

True Empathy

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Part XIX

We will conclude by talking a great deal about what true empathy looks like in terms of the specific and practical ways in which we relate to each other. We have been studying the principles in a relatively abstract way, so what we will do now is focus more on their application to our relationships with people who are in distress, who are suffering, sick, etc., and we will consider this both on the larger scale of the problems of the world, as well as on the personal level of our own problems and the problems of those who are close to us.

We will pick up on a theme we have already covered, namely, the idea of not interacting until we first join within our mind with the Holy Spirit, or with Jesus. As we are aware, how to truly help each other is a major theme of the Course. And that when we try to help, we should not do it on our own, but rather with the help of the Holy Spirit. Trying to do it on our own was what got us into trouble in the first place, if you remember. The ego believed that it could do things on its own, without God's help, and that is what is carried over, then, to how we usually try to solve problems here in the world—on our own. We know what is best for people; we know what the problems are, and what the solutions are.

In view of this, therefore, I thought that we would begin with a passage from "The Gifts of God," the prose poem at the end of the book of Helen's poetry called *The Gifts of God*. The section I am going to read is called "The Two Gifts," beginning on page 118 in the book and ending on the following page. This is a wonderfully moving passage in which Jesus speaks to us about taking his hand, a theme we have been discussing a lot. To take his hand means that we have to drop the ego's hand. He speaks specifically here about exchanging the ego's gifts of fear or, in the context of what we have been talking about, the dreams of fear that the ego has made—the dreams of pain, suffering, sickness, death, punishment, etc.—to exchange them by first bringing these ego's gifts to him and giving them to him and, then in exchange, to receive his gifts—the gifts of love, the gifts of healing, and the gifts of God.

A number of the themes that we have discussed will be brought up in this passage. If you remember, at the end of "The Greater Joining" section, Jesus suddenly shifts the whole tone and addresses God, the Father, and prays on our behalf (T-28.IV.9:1-2). The same thing happens here as well at the close of this section.

As you read it—it is written in the first person—try to hear Jesus himself speaking to you, asking you to exchange your perceptions and illusions and fears for his peace and love. This basically then is the formula for how we approach all problems in the world—rather than believing we know what the problem and the solution are, we bring our faulty perception to Jesus, so that we can look at the problems, the suffering, and the pain in the world through his eyes rather than our own.

The Two Gifts

How can you be delivered from all gifts the world has offered you? How can you change these little, cruel offerings for those that Heaven gives and God would have you keep? Open your hands, and give all things to me that you have held against your holiness and kept as slander on the Son of God. Practice with every one you recognize as what it is. Give me these worthless things the instant that you see them through my eyes and understand their cost. Then give away these bitter dreams as you perceive them now to be but that, and nothing more than that.

I take them from you gladly, laying them beside the gifts of God that he has placed upon the altar to His Son. And these I give to you to take the place of those you give to me in mercy on yourself. These are the gifts I ask, and only these. For as you lay them by you, reach to me, and I can come as savior then to you. The gifts of God are in my hands, to give to anyone who would exchange the world for Heaven. You need only call my name and ask me to accept the gift of pain from willing hands that would be laid in mine, with thorns laid down and nails long thrown away as one by one the sorry gifts of earth are joyously relinquished. In my hands is everything you want and need and hoped to find among the shabby toys of earth. I take them all from you and they are gone. And shining in the place where once they stood there is a gateway to another world through which we enter in the Name of God.

Father, we thank You for these gifts that we have found together. Here we are redeemed. For it is here we joined, and from this place of holy joining we will come to You because we recognize the gifts You gave and would have nothing else. Each hand that finds its way to mine will take Your gifts from me, and as we look together on the place whereon I laid your worthless gifts for you, we will see nothing but the gifts of God reflected in the shining round our heads.

Holy are we who know our holiness, for it is You Who shine Your light on us, and we are thankful, in Your ancient Name, that You have not forgotten. What we thought we made of You has merely disappeared, and with its going are the images we made of Your creation gone as well. And it is finished. For we now commend into Your Hands the spirit of Your Son who seemed to lose his way a little while but never left the safety of Your Love. The gifts of fear, the dream of death, are done. And we give thanks. And we give thanks, Amen.

I think it is difficult to hear something like this without feeling terribly moved, and it is difficult to make any comments after such a beautiful passage. The idea, of course, is to hear these words coming to us from Jesus and believe them—believe that he really is telling us that all that is necessary for all of our pain and suffering to be gone is to take his hand in ours, and exchange our measly gifts for his wonderful gifts of love and peace.

When we drop his hand and take the ego's hand, it is impossible for us to be gentle, kind, loving, or merciful. Obviously, the ego does not know the meaning of those words. It thinks it does, and we think that we know, but it is always a gentleness that has a bite to it. It is a lovingness that always has a bargain associated with it. The ego only gives in order to get.

At that point, then, we use the principles of the Course as a way, not of healing our minds or of being an instrument of healing for other minds, but as a club. The Course then is used as a way of judging, just as people throughout the centuries, playing God, have used religious teachings to judge and separate others. The God they attempt to play, though, is not a loving God Who does not see error, but a strict God Who sees sins and seeks to undo them through punishment.

Therefore, when we take Jesus' hand, we have exchanged all of the ego's thoughts and dreams of hatred and judgment, separation, differences and attack, for Jesus' dreams and thoughts of kindness, mercy, and love. That is what enables us to relate to each other differently. It is impossible to feel separate from Jesus and yet still feel joined with God's Love, or, obviously, still feel joined with each other.

We will see as we go through some other ideas and examples how essential joining with Jesus is. You can always tell if you are hearing the ego's voice rather than Jesus' voice: Some of the clear signs are experiencing yourself as not being gentle and kind, and holding the principles of the Course above the love of the Course by wanting people to *understand* the insane things that they are doing without your really caring about the people. At such times, all that you really want is to prove that you are right and they are wrong. This can be rather obvious—and it is usually obvious to the recipient of your "love." At other times it is very subtle and you can feel that you are really helping, when all that you are doing is reinforcing the very problem that you are supposedly trying to heal.

What allows this mistake to happen is the confusion between form and content, which is one of the central themes in the Course. One of the principal ways the Course distinguishes between special relationships and holy relationships is that special relationships are always involved with form, and holy relationships are always involved with content. In teaching the Course or applying the Course in your dealings with others, it is a mistake to think of the Course as a series of teachings or principles, all of which are the form. The Course is an expression of the love of Jesus. That is the content. That is what the Course is about. It comes in a specific form, but it is the love that you want, not the principles.

Remember that our goal is to be happy, not to be right. It is extremely tempting to be involved with the Course and believe that you are right—that here at last is the truth—that for two thousand years the Christian world has presumed to be teaching the truth but was not—and now we know exactly what the truth is. On one level, I believe that is true, but you do not want to confuse the form for the content. It is the *content* of love that you want.

Let me start by reading a passage in the text. It comes relatively early (T-2.IV.4-5), but I think it ought to be mandatory reading and study, memorization even, for those who think they are a teacher of God—in other words, a student or a teacher of the Course who wants to work with others.

The immediate context in which this discussion occurs is the use of magic. Specifically, the "magic" being referred to is the use of medicine—for example, taking some pills or other medicine to alleviate pain in a sick body. This is magic. In the Course, magic is anything the ego tells us will solve the problem that does not solve the problem. As we have seen, the ego sees all of our problems as involving the body. Magic is anything on the level of the world that takes away the problem that the ego has made real. Underneath the word "problems" on the chart, we could put the word "magic." Magic is an attempt to solve the problem of the mind, which is guilt, by doing something with the body. The Course says that the "ego's maxim [is] 'Seek but do not find'" (T-16.V.6:5). That is what magic always does. It seeks and seeks for a solution to a problem that does not exist. Magic gives the illusion that a solution has been found, but of course it never works. Magic is an attempt to solve the problem of the mind on the level of the body. At the very beginning of the text, in the miracle principles and a little afterwards as well, the Course refers to this as the confusion of levels—the confusion of the level of the mind with the level of the body (T-1.I.12:2-3; T-2.VI.1:6-8).

The miracle shifts the problem from our body, where we *believe* it is, back to our mind, where it truly is—the problem being that we decided the ego was right and the Holy Spirit was wrong. Magic solves the problem where it is not. The miracle brings the problem back to where it is, back to the answer, and at that point it is already solved.

Consider something like a simple headache as an example. The cause of the headache, like the cause of any distress that we experience, is guilt or conflict or separation in our mind, or choosing the ego instead of the Holy Spirit—any of these variants. If we have a headache, we all tend to take aspirin or something else—something which will alleviate the pain that we experience in our heads. And that is magic.

The point of this passage—which can be generalized to basically how we deal with anybody in distress—is to say it is not a sin to take aspirin. In part, this was meant as a correction for the Christian Science practice—which is not always the actual teaching—that basically it is a sin to consult a physician if you are in physical pain. There have been court cases in recent years regarding parents who let their very sick child die, because they would not consult a doctor. So Christian Science religion, as it is practiced, has really thought of going to a doctor as a sin, because the problem is in the mind—magic then would be thought of as a sin.

This is the immediate context of this passage we are about to read: magic does not heal. Only undoing the belief system in our mind through forgiveness heals. But magic nonetheless is not a sin. As we will see, Jesus would say that if you have a headache, and going to the Holy Spirit does not work, that is, you are unable to let go of the cause of the headache, then there is nothing wrong in taking an aspirin so that you feel better, so that the pain goes away and you get a good night's sleep, or whatever. Then as soon as you are able to forgive and join with whomever you have made a symbol of your own ego, you do that.

Thus, basically, the Course teaches that there is nothing wrong with using magic. It simply cautions us to not attribute the characteristics of the miracle to magic. Magic does not heal—it only takes away the symptom. The cause still remains. As long as we can become aware of that, there is no problem. The problem enters when we think we have solved the problem when we have not. If we think we have solved it, then we will never look for the real solution.

Let us start reading then: **Chapter 2 in the text, Section IV, Paragraph 4.**

All material means that you accept as remedies for bodily ills are restatements of magic principles.

What is important here is that when Jesus says "all material means," he means, literally, *all* material means. These days we make distinctions. For example, many people in the New Age movement say that traditional medicine is bad, but other approaches are good—like acupuncture, or meditation, or jogging, or vitamins, or psychic surgery, or standing on your head, or doing a workbook lesson every day. Jesus is saying they are all the same. As long as the purpose is to alleviate the physical symptom, you are into magic, because you are buying into the dream of fear—exactly what we talked about earlier. You are saying that the body is real, that you are the dream, and you must do something to fix it.

The miracle says that you are not the dream. The sickness is not in your body—the sickness is in your mind, in the dreamer who chose the ego instead of the Holy Spirit. Anything that deals with the body—whether it is the physical body, the psychological body, the etheric body, the astral body, or an aura—is

magic. They are all parts of the body, because they are all parts of the separated self. Remember, there is no hierarchy of illusions. There is nothing wrong in doing anything that you feel is going to help you, but try to avoid the arrogance of thinking that your way, your magic, is better than someone else's magic. It is just different. It is not better or worse. Again, when Jesus says "all material means," this is what he is talking about.

This is the first step in believing that the body makes its own illness. [In other words, illness is of the body, therefore healing is of the body.] **It is a second misstep to attempt to heal it through non-creative agents.**

"Creative" here means of the spirit, or of the Holy Spirit. Anything not of the Holy Spirit is magic. Anything of the Holy Spirit is simply the changing of our minds. So the first mistake is in thinking the body is sick; the second mistake is in thinking that the body can be made well by something of the world.

It does not follow, however, that the use of such agents for corrective purposes is evil. Sometimes the illness has a sufficiently strong hold over the mind to render a person temporarily inaccessible to the Atonement.

Jesus is telling us there is nothing wrong or evil or sinful or wicked about using something material to alleviate physical pain. I think he is being kind, though, in saying "Sometimes the illness ?" because clearly it is not that easy. To give the mind over to the Atonement means to let go totally of the investment in this world—at least in that instant. But there is such fear associated with that, because, if you remember, the ego has told us that if we leave the ego and join the Atonement—believing what the Holy Spirit is telling us and taking Jesus' hand, his hand is going to lead us right back to God Who will destroy us. That is the fear—the fear of healing, which the Course talks about later (T-27.II). That is the fear of forgiveness. So we all tend to utilize a compromise approach, as the next sentence says:

In this case it may be wise to utilize a compromise approach to mind and body, in which something from the outside is temporarily given healing belief.

Let us suppose I have a headache. Even though I am a good student of the Course and I know that the headache is coming from some unforgiveness in my mind—that is, that I have dropped the hand of Jesus and taken the hand of the ego, the hand of grievances and attack—my headache is still there. And there is a part of me that still believes that taking an aspirin will help the headache go away. There is nothing wrong in taking the aspirin, as long as I am aware that the aspirin may undo the pain in my head, but it will not undo the pain in my mind, which arose because I separated from the Love of God.

This is because the last thing that can help the non-right-minded, or the sick, is an increase in fear. They are already in a fear-weakened state.

We know that we are in a fear-weakened state, a state of fear, because we have chosen to be sick. Sickness is a decision that we make out of fear because we are afraid of the Love of God. The very fact that we are sick is already telling us that we are fearful. In a larger context, as I have already said, just the fact that we are here in a body is saying we are in a fear-weakened state—it is an expression of our sickness and insanity.

The purpose of the defense is to keep God's Love away. Therefore, to hit people over the head with the Love of God is going to make them even more fearful. That is not helpful or loving. And it is not gentle or kind. Truth is always gentle. Truth is consistent and it does not waver, but it is always gentle and kind.

You may note as you read the Course that its tone is quite authoritative. Jesus is clear about what truth is and what illusion is. There is no mistaking this. As we have seen, many of the passages that we looked at are very clear and very strong. And they are uncompromising in what they teach. But despite the authoritative tone of the Course, it is not authoritarian, which means it is always gentle and kind, even though Jesus is firm in what he is saying. You never get the sense that Jesus is standing over you with a gun or a whip, saying that you must get this right. Nor do you get the sense that he is chastising you or berating you or punishing you. He is simply saying this is what it is, and you will be happier if you take my hand and drop the ego's hand. That is all he says. That is the tone over and over again.

The very fact that you are sick is already saying that you are afraid of God's Love. You are afraid of going back to your mind and taking the hand of Jesus instead of the hand of the ego. Your sickness is already an expression of that fear. You are shouting loudly and clearly, "I am terrified of love, I don't want Jesus anywhere near me." At that point, it is not helpful suddenly to shove Jesus' words or his presence into your face. That is what he is saying here.

If they are prematurely exposed to a miracle, they may be precipitated into panic. This is likely to occur when upside-down perception has induced the belief that miracles are frightening.

Well, we know miracles are frightening. We would not have chosen the world if we did not believe miracles are frightening. Again, the very fact that we are in a body, in this world, and believe this body and the world are our home, and believe as well that there really are people out there who could be of help and comfort to us, etc., is proof that we are terrified of the miracle, because the miracle brings us back into the mind. The ego gets us away from the mind into the world. The ego is filled with magic—it is a magician. The Holy Spirit is the One Who holds all the miracles for us. The fact that we are sick, angry, fearful, guilty, depressed, anxious, annoyed, is saying to us, "I am afraid of love and therefore I had to push it away. And I did it through the particular form of defense that I am experiencing now—sickness, anger, anxiety, etc."

A passage later in the text talks about the Holy Spirit as a Translator (T-7.II.4). The purpose of a translator, who translates from one language into another, is to keep the content but change the form. The form is always adjusted to what the other can read. So if you are translating the Course for Russian readers, obviously you are not going to do it in English. You are going to translate the English into Russian. You want to keep the content, or the meaning of the Course, but the form has to be different, because most people in Russia do not speak English. So the form is changed to meet the needs of those to whom you are relating, but the content is kept the same.

That is the hallmark of a good teacher of the Course—I do not mean a teacher as someone who just stands up and shoots off his mouth. We are all teachers of the Course in terms of reflecting its principles. The hallmark of a good teacher is being able to keep the content of the Course, which is forgiveness and love, and yet teach it in whatever way is most helpful, even if the form may at times contradict the form in which the Course comes.

This obviously is also what makes a therapist a good therapist—you speak to each patient as an individual. You are not teaching psychoanalytic theory, if that is your perspective, but you adjust the teachings, whatever they are on the level of content, to a form that each patient can accept. The form does not matter.

There is nothing sacred or sacrosanct about the words in *A Course in Miracles*. What is sacred or sacrosanct is the love that inspired those words. The words themselves do not mean anything—the content underneath is the meaning.