**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-pI.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-pI.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-pI.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-pI.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.

**Part II
Commentary on Lesson 92**

Let's turn to the workbook, Lesson 92. We'll read a good part of this lesson, as it serves as a nice introduction. The title of the lesson is "Miracles are seen in light, and light and strength are one." This is a continuation of the previous lesson, "Miracles are seen in light," but extends it quite a bit.

**(Lesson 92 - Paragraph 1 - Sentences 1-3) The idea for today is an extension of the previous one. You do not think of light in terms of strength, and darkness in terms of weakness. That is because your idea of what seeing means is tied up with the body and its eyes and brain.**

The ego has told us that our weakness lies in the mind. It teaches us that if we stay in the mind we will be destroyed, and that strength lies in opposing God—that strength really comes from stealing God's strength. To the ego, making up a world and a body is a source of strength, because this is the defense against God. If God comes into the picture, the ego is finished. So we confuse strength and weakness. We confuse light and darkness. The true light is in the mind, and that light is represented by the Holy Spirit. The ego stifles that light, drowns out the Holy Spirit's Voice of the Atonement, His Voice of Love. The ego hides in darkness and makes up its own world, which is a world of darkness and weakness, because it is the absence of light, strength, and love. Then the ego makes up a body with a brain; it's the body that tells us there is light and darkness. And the body, which carries out the dictates of the mind, tells us what strength is. Strength is always some aspect of making the body real. So in this world we define strength as courage, as overcoming great obstacles, as having a lot of muscles. We define strength as a quality of people who have very strong wills, who have overcome all kinds of problems, etc. All these definitions are different ways of glorifying the ego.

**(1:4-5) Thus you believe that you can change what you see by putting little bits of glass before your eyes. This is among the many magical beliefs that come from the conviction you are a body, and the body's eyes can see.**

So everybody who wears glasses ought to feel guilty, right? We actually believe that our eyes see, that our ears hear, that our taste buds taste, that our hands feel, that our brains think, etc. In reality, the body does absolutely nothing but carry out the dictates of the mind. In many other places, the Course amplifies this idea, but this is one of the clearest and simplest expressions of it.

I mentioned earlier that studying this topic, as we are doing, will help us recognize just how profound this thought system is, and how important its metaphysical teachings are for understanding what forgiveness really is. When Jesus tells us that the body's eyes don't see, he means it very literally. There is nothing to see, because there is nothing out here. All the world is is a projection of a thought that we actually believe we see outside. All we are seeing is a mirror of a thought that is in the mind. There is no seeing here. There is no thinking here.

Earlier in the workbook, the Course talks about how the thoughts we think we think are not our real thoughts (W-pI.rI.51.4:2). The brain doesn't think. It's the mind that has the thought. And basically there are only two thoughts: the thought of the ego, and the thought of the Holy Spirit, one of fear and one of love. But there is no seeing or thinking here—no more than a puppet thinks. We can adapt what Shakespeare said in As You Like It, "All the world's a stage, and all the people are merely players on it," to "All the world's a puppet stage, and all the people in it are merely puppets." All we are doing is carrying out the instructions of the mind.

Since we represent thoughts of fear, we do not experience genuine thoughts of love. What we call love is really forgiveness. In other words, what we can do in this world is look at fear and smile at it and that undoes fear. As the Course explains elsewhere, forgiveness is this world's expression of Heaven's Love. However, when we look with the ego, we see a very bleak and hopeless picture of ourselves. Even though we may feel we yearn to get back home more than anything else, it very often can feel as if we're never going to get there. Hope starts when we can look at the ego's looking and say, "Yes, of course, that's what the ego's going to do; it's going to make all this look hopeless."

We'll see as we go on that the ego has caused us to take this world very, very seriously. False empathy is taking someone's problems very seriously. Feeling sorry for ourselves is taking our own selves very seriously. And this is simply the reflection of the original mistake, when we took the ego thought very seriously. Recall the line I quoted at the beginning, "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). If we had laughed at it, as the Atonement principle would have us do, we would have realized that this is a preposterous thought. How could a part of God separate from Him? How could a part of God believe it could hurt and destroy God? How could it believe that it could make God into a raging maniac, etc., etc.? We would have seen that that thought of the ego makes no sense at all.

A couple of lines later Jesus says: "It is a joke to think that time can come to circumvent eternity, which means there is no time" (T-27.VIII.6:5). It is a joke to think that any aspect of the ego could have any effect on eternity and could rupture it. Remember, "not one note in Heaven's song was missed" (T-26.V.5:4). It's absurd and silly to believe that a note in Heaven's song could be changed on account of this thought.

Because we took the ego seriously—the words, sin, guilt, and fear are very serious words—the world which came from these thoughts must also be very serious. We then make up expressions of what is serious: sickness, pain, injustice, oppression, torture, etc., all of which seem to be very, very serious. And then we feel sorry or bad about what happens, and we want to change it. All that we're doing is falling right into the ego trap, because we have shifted our attention from the mind to the world and have forgotten the mind and where the suffering really is. The suffering is not in the world, it is in the mind. We'll come back to this theme again and again.

**(2:1-2) You also believe the body's brain can think. If you but understood the nature of thought, you could but laugh at this insane idea.**

One of the basic ideas in the work of Krishnamurti, the great Indian teacher, is the nature of thought. He said exactly what this passage is saying, that what we think are thoughts are not our thoughts. His purpose was to help us get to the end of thought, and the end of thought is love. Everything else is a defense against that. All pain and all fear are simply false thoughts—not our true thoughts at all. This is the same idea.

If we really understood the nature of thought, we would laugh at this insane idea that "the body's brain can think." The nature of thought is that it is in the mind, and there are only two thoughts: love and fear. One is real and one is false. In the section called "The Two Emotions," which could be renamed "The Two Thoughts," Jesus says, "You have but two emotions, one you made and one was given you" (T-13.V.10:1). The emotion that was given us of course is love, and the emotion or the thought that we made is the ego's fear, which is a defense against love. The Course says right at the beginning in the Introduction, "The opposite of love is fear, but what is all-encompassing can have no opposite" (T-in.1:8). The opposite of love is fear, but love doesn't have an opposite, because love is everything. Therefore, there is no fear. Jesus is saying: "If you but understood the nature of thought, you would laugh at the idea that the body can actually think." Not only is there no brain, there is no body, there is no world, there is nothing—just as there are no real people on a movie screen. That's simply an illusion. People are not walking or running on a movie screen—it's simply an optical illusion. The frames go by so quickly that it appears as if people are actually doing things on the screen. When we understand the nature of thought, when we understand the nature of a movie, we realize how silly it is to think that anything is happening on the screen. Most of the time we do understand what a movie is, so we are not taken in by the illusion. The problem is that the world is the exact same situation, but we are taken in, and we forget that the whole thing is made up.

**(2:3) It is as if you thought you held the match that lights the sun and gives it all its warmth; or that you held the world within your hand securely bound until you let it go.**

This is analogous to the section in the text called "The Little Garden" (T-18.VIII), where the same point is made. There the image is of an imperceptible ripple on the ocean that believes it's the ocean, or a tiny sunbeam that believes it's the sun. This is the same idea. This is what we believe. This insignificant nothing that we think is so incredible, the body, really has no effect on anything. The whole thing is simply an illusion; nothing is here at all. Yet the arrogance of the ego mind, which translates into the arrogance of the human brain, is that we believe that we are important. We believe that we can do things and that we can have an effect. We believe it's a great thing if we send a rocket ship to the moon, or discover a cure for AIDS or for cancer, or win the Super Bowl or the World Series. All the things that really make people excited and crazy in this world reflect the idea that we believed we could triumph over God. We forget that we are the ones who made up this entire physical universe, so what's the big deal if we move one part of the illusion to another, from the planet earth to Mars or the moon or any place else? We're looking in the wrong place. The idea is to move beyond our experiences in the world of the body, back to the mind that thought it.

**(2:4) Yet this is no more foolish than to believe the body's eyes can see; the brain can think.**

In other words, it's no more foolish to believe that you have a match with a tiny little spark that can light up the whole sun. If we think about these lines, or "unthink" about them, we will realize just how effective the ego has been, and how much we have bought into its magic. We really believe that we think and see and hear and feel and have pain and pleasure, etc. We really believe all this is important. And yet this is all part of the distraction—the smokescreen effect. The real problem, which is the choice we made in the mind between the ego and the Holy Spirit, is totally blocked off and has been covered over by all the seemingly important things that go on here in the world and the body.

**(3:1) It is God's strength in you that is the light in which you see, as it is His Mind with which you think.**

The Holy Spirit becomes the reflection of God's Mind within the split mind, being the memory of God's Love.

**(3:2-4) His strength denies your weakness. It is your weakness that sees through the body's eyes, peering about in darkness to behold the likeness of itself; the small, the weak, the sickly, and the dying, those in need, the helpless and afraid, the sad, the poor, the starving, and the joyless. These are seen through eyes that cannot see and cannot bless.**

"The likeness of itself," the ego self, is sinful, guilty, fearful, limited, small, suffering, and dying. That of course is all expressed in the body. So we look out in order to find the witnesses that will tell us that this self is true. Therefore we see: "the small, the weak, the sickly, and the dying, those in need, the helpless and afraid, the sad, the poor, the starving, and the joyless." These are all synonyms to describe the same basic thought of the ego—what sin, guilt, and fear are. And so this is what we see.

The ego has made a world that is the mirror of itself, which we see as the world and make real. We're not talking about seeing without making real. For example, when Jesus was here, his body's eyes saw what everybody else saw, but he did not react to it as if it were real, because he knew it was a dream. Living in the real world and having one's mind healed doesn't mean that you do not physically see with your eyes what everybody else sees, but you realize that what your eyes are seeing and bringing back to you is an illusion. You don't deny what your body's eyes see; you just give it a different interpretation, and therefore your experience is different. If we react to anything that we see in this world, whether it is a reaction of pleasure or of pain—if we hear on the news an account of a brutal rape, or a catastrophe like a building falling down and trapping people in it, or an earthquake, or an invasion of another country, or stories of torture, and we find ourselves getting angry, frightened, guilty, excited, terrified, or feeling sorry for the victims—we're doing exactly what this passage is talking about. The ego mind has told our eyes to peer about in darkness and to behold the likeness of itself.

Again, what we see are "the small, the weak, the sickly and the dying, those in need, the helpless and afraid, the sad, the poor, the starving and the joyless." And we know that's what we are seeing and making real when we get upset, when we choose up sides in a conflict, when our hearts go out to people who are in pain.

As we will see later, these are examples of what the Course would consider false empathy, when we identify with someone's weakness instead of someone's strength. The weakness is not of the body; the seeming weakness of the body is the reflection of the weakness of the ego thought system, which is weak because it opposes the strength of God. The strength of Christ in ourselves and in each other is the reflection of the presence of the Holy Spirit. That is what true empathy is: we empathize with the strength of Christ in each other rather than with the weakness of the ego.

It is important to realize that there is a purpose that underlies our perceiving the world the way that we do and our making the world the way we did. This wasn't an accident. We made the world to mirror what is in the mind—the suffering, the fear, the terror, the littleness, and the sickliness that are in the ego mind. What was made real in the mind and projected out we now see outside us, not in the mind. If we saw it in the mind and stayed in the mind, we would at some point hear the Voice of the Holy Spirit and realize the whole thing is made up. The Love of God calls to us so compellingly that the fear of the ego would disappear. That is why the ego takes the fear, the littleness, the suffering, and the guilt, and projects them out into a world. It makes up a body that objectifies what is in the mind so that it is outside. And then we totally forget where it came from. We no longer have a choice here. The only choice that we have, which mirrors the choice in the mind, is "kill or be killed" (M-17.7:10). Do you die or do I die? What I want is not to see sickness in myself but to perceive it outside myself, in you. If you're the one who's sick, then I am well. We'll get into this more when we talk about sickness later on. But that's the purpose of perceiving pain and suffering and victims in the world—so we don't see them in the mind.

Another way of explaining the ego thought system is to say that the ego has made victimization real in the mind. The original victim from the ego's point of view is God, and we are the victimizer. We have victimized God. We have stolen from Him. Then the ego turns it around: God is hurt. God is angry. God is wrathful. God is going to victimize us. We become the innocent victims, and He is the mean victimizer. Since that is the original ego thought that was projected out into the world, the world then becomes a place of victimization. Before the victimization was played out in my mind, however, I still had a choice of whether to listen to the ego who tells me about its reality, or to the Holy Spirit Who laughs at the whole thought of victimization. Once that thought has been made real and placed in a world and I have a body that sees victimization all around me, I no longer think there is any choice. The only choice now is: Who is going to be the victim, and who is going to be the victimizer?

What is really important to understand is the motivation behind our perceiving pain and suffering and injustice in the world. And the ego never tells us what its ultimate purpose is. Its ultimate purpose is always murder (T-24.II.12:6). The ego would never let us recognize that "what is not love is murder" (T-23.IV.1:10), and nothing here is love. So it tells us its version of love. Its version of love is compassion, concern, pity, feeling sorry for people, taking care of people, ministering to people, taking away people's pain, etc., and we call that love. The ego never tells us its ultimate purpose, which is to kill.

Instead it makes up a world of pain and suffering, and tells us we will be the good people, and we will undo pain and suffering in the world. These are the do-gooders in the world. That is why Jesus says, "Trust not your good intentions. They are not enough" (T-18.IV.2:1-2). It is the well-intentioned people who are the most terrible people in the world. They are the ones you have to watch out for, because they seem to be something other than what they are. An ill-intentioned person is a blessing, because you know exactly what you are up against. I am not saying that such a person is all-loving, but at least you know what you are getting. With Hitler, you knew exactly what you were getting right from the beginning. With the ego's version of love you don't know. That is what special love is. These are the people who are always trying to help others. The governments that are going to make the world safe for democracy are the governments you have to watch out for. These are the people who see the problems in the world and are going to solve the problems in the world, which means that they fall nicely into the whole ego thought system. There is no problem in the world, because there is no world. There is no sickness in the world, because there is no body to be sick. There is no suffering in the world, because there is no self that can experience suffering in the world. The whole thing is one big magic trick, because the problem is in the mind, but it's seen out here in the world. Once seen in the world, we forget where the problem came from; that's what the veil of denial or forgetfulness accomplishes. The body tells us there is indeed something out here. So we believe that the body can see, the brain can think, etc., etc. And the whole thing is made up.

**Part III
Commentary on Lesson 92 (concluded)**

**(Paragraph 4 - Sentence 1) Strength overlooks these things by seeing past appearances.**

"Strength," as we will see later on, is the strength of Christ, which basically means looking through the eyes of the Holy Spirit, or the eyes of Jesus—what the Course refers to as the vision of Christ or the perception of the Holy Spirit. The vision of Christ overlooks the things of the world by seeing past appearances, which means that we see what the world has made real and say, "But the problem is not there; the problem is in the mind."

Remember the fairy tale, The Emperor's New Clothes? Well, that is basically what this is saying. The Emperor has no clothes on. The problem is not all the terrible clothing that the body, the Emperor, has here. There are no clothes. In fact, there is no Emperor. The whole thing is made up. But in order for us to see that, we have to look. In the fairy tale the little boy looks at the Emperor with open eyes—not to please the Emperor or to do what the world says he should do—and says the Emperor has no clothes on. In other words, the whole thing is made up. That is what Jesus tries to get us to do in the Course: to look at the world and the suffering in the world and say it's all made up. There is nothing here.

In a passage near the end of Chapter 27, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit does not look to effects but looks to their cause (T-27.VIII.9:1). We have judged the effects; He has judged the cause. We look to all the effects (let me put the word "effect" here on the **chart**), to what has come from the mind, and therefore judge effects. We say some effects are good, some are bad, some are pleasurable, some are painful, some are holy, some are unholy, some are alive, some are dead. We make a hierarchy of illusions, which is the first law of chaos, and we judge among them. The Holy Spirit does not look to effects. He does not deal with the world. He looks to the cause. The cause is the mind that chose to identify with the ego instead of with Him. The cause of all the suffering and pain in the world is believing that the "tiny, mad idea" is something serious. The Holy Spirit looks at the "tiny, mad idea," smiles and says, "Isn't that silly? It is nothing more than a silly dream." At that point the whole thing disappears. The Holy Spirit does not look to the appearances, but goes beyond them.

**(Paragraph 4 - Sentences 2-4) It** [The Holy Spirit's strength] **keeps its steady gaze upon the light that lies beyond them. It unites with light of which it is a part. It sees itself.**

This is an expression of the "Greater Joining" (T-28.IV), which we will talk about later when we do that section. What this means for us is that—and I'm getting a little ahead of what we are talking about now—when I find myself getting trapped, I am seeing through the eyes of the ego. I know I'm trapped when I make some aspect of the physical or psychological world real—I take something here seriously; I feel there is a problem outside that has to be corrected or someone out here who has to be helped and I'm the one who is going to do it or see that it is done, and that becomes my motivation. I am seeing through the eyes of the ego, which means I am seeing through the eyes of darkness, because I am seeing something that is literally not here. There is no problem here.

When I do get trapped, the Holy Spirit asks me to choose a miracle instead of the grievance or the projection of the ego—which is the whole message of the Course. This means I go back to that place in my mind where I had seemingly joined with the darkness of the ego against the light of the Holy Spirit, and now I change my mind. When I do that I join with the light, and look at the world through that light. I look at the world through Christ's vision, through the eyes of strength. Now I see—not people in pain, physically or emotionally, not some problem in the world—I see others calling out for the Love of God that they believe they have separated from and which they believe they will never, ever more rejoin. That is what I see.

This does not mean that, on a behavioral level, I don't do something for someone in the world. It means that if I do, I don't do it out of weakness or pity. I don't do it out of feeling sorry for the person. I do it because I am answering that person's call for love on the level that that person can accept it. Whenever anybody is in pain, that person is saying, "I have turned the Love of God into an enemy, and I am being punished. I now need a happy dream which ends that pain." And so I join with that person seemingly to end the physical pain, which I may have the power to do. But what I am really doing by ending another's physical pain is giving a message that says God is not angry at you, and by my love and my peace I am reflecting for you the love and peace that is inside you. Just as I was able to make a choice not to make your error real, not to make guilt or sin real, so can you make the same choice. On the level of form or behavior I may do exactly what someone else does, but my motivation will be different. I will be doing it from a place of strength, not weakness. It is not my heart that goes out to you; it is the light in my mind that calls to the light in your mind. It is not that I identify with your weakness. The strength of Christ in me calls to your mind to make the same choice I did, which is to join with the strength of Christ in you. That is the joining. I do not join with you on the level of the body. That is not joining. I join with you in my mind, which means part of my mind is able to look beyond the appearances and sees whatever is going on in this world as an expression of the call for the Love of God that you believe you have separated from. This is an idea that we will come back to over and over again.

So the light sees itself. There is no experience then of separation. My body's eyes see you as separate; but when my mind is healed, I realize that the light of Christ shines in you, just as it shines in me, despite the appearances of the ego's darkness.

**(Paragraph 4 - Sentences 4-6) It** [the light] **sees itself. It brings the light in which your Self appears. In darkness you perceive a self that is not there.**

The Holy Spirit becomes the memory of our reality as Christ, the reminder of Who we are as Christ, the real Self. "In darkness" refers to our turning away from the light of the Holy Spirit and identifying with the ego thought system. Remember, when we chose the ego we became the ego. At that point we identify with a sinful, separated self that is literally not there, because we never left home. If I identify with a limited, separated self in my mind, I identify with all the limited, separated selves in the world. Some I identify with—these are the people I join with, my special love partners. Some I identify against, because I see in them something I do not want to see in myself. In all cases I am joining with someone and something that is literally not there.

**(Paragraph 4 - Sentence 7) Strength is the truth about you; weakness is an idol falsely worshipped and adored that strength may be dispelled, and darkness rule where God appointed that there should be light.**

That is exactly what the ego has done—substitute itself for God. In the image that I mentioned earlier, the little imperceptible ripple or wave believes it is the ocean but it does not have the power of the ocean. It is absolutely nothing, just as a little sunbeam does not have the power of the sun. But the sunbeam believes in its arrogance that it is the sun, and the ripple believes in its arrogance that it is the ocean. We hold up a match and believe we are literally the light of the world—that we, this little match, give the sun all of its light. The ego believes it has stolen the strength of God, so that God does not have it and the ego now has it. Then the ego makes up a dream in which it is king. "Look what I can do. I can make up a world. I can make up a body." In one version, the ego says, "I am greater than God because I can destroy what I have made. God cannot do that."

The ego, in its upside-down insanity, makes itself stronger than God, Who does not have the power to destroy what He created. But the ego does. The ego builds bombs and all kinds of weapons, and says, "Look how strong I am!" Listen to the words of President Bush about the Persian Gulf, when he was flexing his muscles and telling Hussein, "Look what I can do. Look at all the power that I have. Fifty thousand troops are not enough; a hundred thousand, two-hundred thousand are not enough. We are going to show you how strong we are."

We are not telling Hussein how strong we are; we are telling God how strong we are. The ego always tries to show how strong and powerful it is—how great its strength is. This is what the world, egos, and bodies are always doing to hide the fact that we really are an insignificant nothing. The ego knows that. While the ego does not know about the Love of God or the strength of God, because that is beyond its reality, it does know on some level there is a power greater than itself. That is the power of our minds to choose. That is what the ego is afraid of. It is really not afraid of God, because it doesn't know about God. What it is really afraid of is the power of the Son of God's mind to choose, because the power of the ego does not come from itself. It literally has no power. The ego's seeming power comes from the Son of God who identifies with it. When we withdraw our belief in the ego, the ego literally vanishes. As the Course explains, again, the ego disappears back into the nothingness from which it came (M-13.1:2).

The seeming power of terror, of self-hatred, of murder, of pain, is not within the fear, pain, terror or guilt; the power comes from our belief in that thought system. That is extremely important. Pain does not come from the body, no matter how powerful or painful it may be—and we all know how painful the body can feel at times. The pain does not come from the body, the pain comes from our belief in it. Jesus is quoted as saying in the gospel, "All power in Heaven and earth is given unto me." We have that same power. It is the power in the mind.

We are guilty over our minds because we believe that the power and strength in our minds came from stealing; we stole it from God. When we are in our right minds, we realize that power is the reflection of God's Love. The purpose of the Holy Spirit and Jesus is to be a reminder in our minds that we have all power.

Workbook Lesson 253 says, "My Self is ruler of the universe." My mind contains within it the power of the universe of Christ, but my mind also contains within it the pseudo-power of the ego's universe. The world is simply the mirror of what is in our minds. We take the littleness and the weakness of the ego, project it out and make a body that is inherently weak because it is going to deteriorate and eventually die. Then we try to minister to the body, which is the ego trying to sustain and nourish and comfort itself. This just keeps the whole illusion that there is an ego.

Let me go back now to Lesson 92. What this lesson is reflecting is the difference between the strength of Christ's vision and the weakness of the ego's perceptions. The ego, which is basically a thought of weakness, suffering, guilt, and of pain and death, automatically gives rise to a perception of the world in that way. Our true strength lies in the presence of the Holy Spirit in the mind. When we look through His eyes, join with His thinking, and identify with His mind, we look out and see strength all over. Not that the body necessarily is strong, but we recognize in every seeming pain in the world a call for the strength of God that is underneath it. That will be a major theme of what we will be talking about next.

I'll begin reading from the fifth paragraph and go almost to the end of the lesson.

**(Paragraphs 5-10)** Strength comes from truth, and shines with light its Source has given it; weakness reflects the darkness of its maker. It is sick and looks on sickness, which is like itself. Truth is a savior and can only will for happiness and peace for everyone. It gives its strength to everyone who asks, in limitless supply. It sees that lack in anyone would be a lack in all. And so it gives its light that all may see and benefit as one. Its strength is shared, that it may bring to all the miracle in which they will unite in purpose and forgiveness and in love.

Weakness, which looks in darkness, cannot see a purpose in forgiveness and in love. It sees all others different from itself, and nothing in the world that it would share. It judges and condemns, but does not love. In darkness it remains to hide itself, and dreams that it is strong and conquering, a victor over limitations that but grow in darkness to enormous size.

It fears and it attacks and hates itself, and darkness covers everything it sees, leaving its dreams as fearful as itself. No miracles are here, but only hate. It separates itself from what it sees, while light and strength perceive themselves as one. The light of strength is not the light you see. It does not change and flicker and go out. It does not shift from night to day, and back till the morning comes again.

The light of strength is constant, sure as love, forever glad to give itself away, because it cannot give but to itself. No one can ask in vain to share its sight, and none who enters its abode can leave without a miracle before his eyes, and strength and light abiding in his heart.

The strength in you will offer you the light, and guide your seeing so you do not dwell on idle shadows that the body's eyes provide for self-deception. Strength and light unite in you, and where they meet, your Self stands ready to embrace you as Its Own. Such is the meeting place we try today to find and rest in, for the peace of God is where your Self, His Son, is waiting now to meet Itself again, and be as one.

Let us give twenty minutes twice today to join this meeting. Let yourself be brought unto your Self. Its strength will be the light in which the gift of sight is given you. Leave, then, the dark a little while today, and we will practice seeing in the light, closing the body's eyes and asking truth to show us how to find the meeting place of self and Self, where light and strength are one.

One of the major themes that we will be talking about is joining, what it is, and what it is not. The end of this workbook lesson discusses this. To the ego joining always means joining with itself. We discussed how in the original ontological instant when the decision maker had to make his choice, he joined with the ego instead of with the Holy Spirit. From that joining, which is really a pseudo-joining, because it is joining with nothing, the whole world is made. We continually join with this limited and separated self that is the ego. In the world, the limited and separated self is no longer in the mind but is in the body, and so joining for us in the world is joining with other people. There is an important line in the text that says "minds are joined; bodies do not" (T-18.VI.3:1). Bodies do not join. When we find ourselves in sympathy and empathizing with people who are in pain, or identifying with a particular group against another group, we are identifying and joining with their bodies. That is not joining, because we are joining with an illusion. We are joining with weakness instead of strength.

In true joining, we change our minds and move away from the ego and back to the Holy Spirit. That is the meeting place that the lesson talked about, the meeting place of the little "s" self with the capital "S" Self. The capital "S" Self is represented for us in the dream by the Holy Spirit, Who reminds us of the Self we are as Christ. The little "s" self is the self that believes in separation. When the decision maker moves away from identifying with the ego self and begins to move towards the Holy Spirit, that is the meeting place. The meeting place is within the mind, the decision-making part of the mind that chooses to identify and join with the Holy Spirit. When we join with Him there is no separation. As we said earlier, the ego believes in separation, difference, judgment, and attack, and they all are virtually the same thing. In fact, not only virtually, they are the same thing. When we join with the Holy Spirit we are joining with the unity of God and Christ. We are joining with the love of Heaven that has no division or differentiation to it. Then when we peer out into the dream we no longer experience differences or separation. As I mentioned earlier, whatever is on the film that is running through the projector in the movie theater is exactly and identically what we perceive on the screen. So, too, when we join in the mind with the Holy Spirit, which is joining with the unity of Christ, we experience unity and love on the screen of our lives, in the world. It does not mean the body's eyes will not perceive differences, but the differences will make no difference. In other words, the Love of God that we are now identifying with is totally unaffected by the seeming differences that the body's eyes perceive.

That is what Jesus means in the passage at the end of Chapter 15, which was written at New Year's time as a kind of New Year's prayer: "Make this year different by making it all the same" (T-15.XI.10:11). In other words, don't make differences real. Chapter 15 is the first place in the text where Jesus discusses special relationships. And the hallmark of specialness is differences: You are different from me, you have something that I want, and I want to get it from you. When we join with the Holy Spirit or with Jesus in the mind, we no longer experience differences. If we no longer experience a difference between ourselves and the Love of God, it is impossible to experience any real difference out here in the world. We do not see people as separate and different from us, and therefore we make no judgments against them and we don't attack.

"The Greater Joining"—the title of the section we will look at later—is this joining of Christ with Himself, or the joining of Christ with God. We do that first in the mind, and automatically the vision and unity and experience of love extend through us into the dream, and we no longer experience people as different from us. No matter how mangled their bodies may be, no matter how much in pain they are, no matter how terrible their situations are, we do not experience ourselves as different from them. We will go into all that in more depth later on.

**Part IV
Commentary on the Section "True Empathy" (T-16.I)**

We will turn now to the section called **"True Empathy" (T-16.I)**. This section, incidentally, was not originally part of the Course. It came as a special message to Helen, but it came at this time in the dictation, and obviously fit in very nicely with what was being talked about, so it was left in, virtually the way it was dictated to her.

It is interesting that the passage at the bottom of this page, which we will read later, talks about how I need do nothing except not to interfere. Another section later on in the text called "I Need Do Nothing," was also a special message for Helen. This was an important theme that Jesus was trying to get Helen to accept: that she did not have to do anything. That is probably the most important theme in the Course—that we don't have to do anything. We simply have to accept truth and reality for what they are. In the context of this workshop, this means we do not have to do anything about people's problems. We do not have to feel bad for people and try to solve their problems, because it is always the ego that wants to do something. We can see how nicely this fits into the whole ego trap. Right at the beginning the ego told us that we have to do something. A real problem exists in the mind, which has been transformed into a battleground. The real problem is God's wrath and vengeance, and we must do something about it. The "doing" took the form of having a defense against that fear, and the world became that fortress.

When in the Course Jesus says we need do nothing, he means there is nothing that has to be done because there is no problem that has to be solved. All we need do is accept the Holy Spirit's Atonement message. Right at the beginning the Holy Spirit said, "All you need to do is accept what I am telling you." The ego said, "What you have to do is accept what Iam telling you and do something about it." That was our mistake: We turned to the ego. We accepted its truth that the separation had occurred and that we had to do something to defend against God's expected punishment.

You know you are involved with false empathy rather than true empathy when you feel impelled to do something: You have to comfort somebody; you have to solve the problem; you have to remedy the situation; you have to relieve the pain; you have to do something. What we are talking about is not what you do on a behavioral level, but the impetus that you feel within you, the need that you have to do something. In true empathy you do not do anything. The Love of God simply does it through you, but you do not have a need to help anybody else. We'll talk more about this as we go on.

**(Paragraph 1 - Sentence 1) To empathize does not mean to join in suffering, for that is what you must refuse to understand.**

When we become the ego, we make up a world that teaches us what we have already taught the world: that it is a good thing to help people. When the Course talks about joining, it doesn't mean joining with people on the level of the body or the level of form. It doesn't mean joining together in Course in Miracles groups or with other groups to do things. It is talking about joining with the Holy Spirit, which means learning to accept the fact that we are already joined. When we say, "I have to join with you," what we are saying is "I believe we are not joined and now I must do something about it." That is why the Course teaches us that forgiveness means that we forgive what has not been done, not what has been done. When Jesus talks about joining truly, he means letting go of the interferences we have placed within the mind to the oneness that is already there. All that we do is remove the interferences to the awareness of that presence of oneness in the mind. At the beginning of the text, Jesus says that the Course does not aim at teaching the meaning of love because that is beyond what can be taught (T-in.1:6); instead we are taught to remove the interferences to the awareness of the presence of love. We don't join with each other, because we are already joined. We join with the Holy Spirit, Who then becomes the reminder and the witness and the proof that we are already one with God. In false empathy we feel we actually have to join with someone. True empathy means joining with the strength of the Holy Spirit in the mind, and that means we will automatically join with the strength in each other, because the strength of Christ is already fully joined in us and fully one. There is nothing that we have to do.

The ego wants us, as we see repeatedly, to make the body real, and to make sickness and suffering real. When I see you as suffering and in pain and I want to do something about it, what am I really saying to you? I am saying that you and I are different; you and I are separate; you are in pain and I am not in pain. We are beginning with the four statements that the ego has made into its bible. 1) We see separation. 2) There is now a difference: you're in pain, I'm not. 3) I make a judgment that I have something you don't have, and I am going to give it to you because I'm such a wonderful person. 4) And that basically constitutes an attack, because saying that I have something you do not have means I am better off than you. The truth is that we are both one in Christ, and we both have exactly the same love, the same spiritual identity, and the same peace. There is no difference. When I make your suffering real, I am making the body real and am seeing us as different, which is exactly what the ego wants.

That's why, as I mentioned earlier, you have to be careful of those who always want to help, because they are not coming from a place of love. They are coming from a place of seeing differences: You need help and I am the one who can help you. Remember, we are not talking about behavior. We are talking about the need to be a helper, the need to be a do-gooder, the need to be a healer, the need to be a teacher, the need to be anything in a relationship where we are different from the other person.

One of the ways of recognizing the difference between a special relationship and a holy one is that the special relationship always involves differences. We are different, and you have something that I want. It could be something that my body judges as pleasurable to me and essential to my sense of well-being. Or my ego tells me you have what I don't have: you're innocent, I'm guilty, and I'm going to get your innocence by giving you my guilt. That is what attack is, or what the Course refers to as special hate. You have the innocence of Christ and I do not have it, so I am going to take it from you by proving that you're a bad person. And then I get angry. Sometimes it takes the form of wanting to prove that I am a bad person, so I will do something specifically to make you angry. Either way works. Whether I see myself as the bad person, or I see you as the bad person does not matter. Either way, I am seeing separation and differences. I am making a judgment whether I'm judging against you or judging against myself. And that constitutes an attack because the truth is we are all one in Christ. But the ego always sees differences.

False empathy is always coming from a perception of differences. Suffering is one very clever and effective way the ego makes the body and differences real. We all are suffering. Simply being in a body is the height of suffering. Simply being in this world is suffering, because this world is not our home. We are all suffering. The forms differ, but the forms don't make any difference. The content is what is important. Simply being in this body, in this world, is suffering. And we all share in that. True empathy begins with the idea that we are all suffering—that we all share the same problem. But just as we all share the same problem, namely, that we chose the ego instead of the Holy Spirit, we all share the same solution, the same strength, and the same source of strength.

However, if I see someone in pain and feel that I can relate to that person because I once experienced the same pain, that would be making the error real. I'm saying, "I can relate to you in pain, because I was there once. But I'm not there now." It's not any different. Whenever I have something that you don't have, and I make that real, then I'm caught in the ego trap. I'm going to give you something that you lack, which I have. That's the ego's way of saying, "Look how good I am."

**(Paragraph 1 - Sentence 2) That is the ego's interpretation of empathy** [which is to join in suffering**] and is always used to form a special relationship in which the suffering is shared.**

It becomes: "I feel your pain. I really understand where you're coming from, because I was there myself. I can really feel for you and I can empathize with you." What I'm really saying is that your suffering is real, and I know it's real because I have suffered, too.

There is an underlying problem here, which is even worse when you consider what it fosters. When we feel sorry for someone and feel that person's pain, what we are implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, saying to that person is, "You poor dear, look at the terrible things that have happened to you. It's not your fault that you have this terrible pain or this terrible thing has happened, and I really feel for you." We are saying, "You have no power over your life and no power over your mind; in fact, you are mindless. Things are done to you beyond your control, and you are not responsible for them."

We are reinforcing exactly what the ego wants to be strengthened: the idea that the mind does not exist and that things beyond our control happen to the body. Because the ego has caused the veil of denial to fall across our minds, we are not aware that we are the ones who have chosen to be upset and victimized. When we feel sorry for someone, the underlying idea is: "This is a terrible thing that has happened to you. You need my help." What we are doing is driving the ego's knife in even further. The real help comes from reminding you that you have chosen to be in pain because you have separated yourself from the love of Jesus, and you can pick up his hand again and join with him and your pain will be gone.

So again: When I feel sorry for you I am really saying that I feel bad because of what has happened to you. I am identifying with your experience of yourself as a victim, and am joining in with your defense which says: "I am not a mind, I am not responsible. The world does things to me, and I am powerless before the mercilessness of other people, of the body, of the world, and even of God."

The way that we do help each other is to remind ourselves that we have another choice. In one of the earlier passages in the text which describes the Holy Spirit, Jesus says the Holy Spirit doesn't do anything except remind (T-5.II.7:4). His purpose is to remind us that we have made a faulty choice and we can now make a better choice.

In the manual, a section on healing and the function of the teacher of God as a healer says that what heals is not the hands that are laid on another person nor the words that a person says. What heals is that the healer is the reminder—the healer stands for the Alternative (M-5.III) that reminds the person who is sick that he has made a faulty choice by joining with the ego, and can make a correct choice, which is joining with the Holy Spirit. That's what we do. That's true empathy. We remind each other of the choice for the strength of Christ that is in the mind, as opposed to the weakness of the ego that always separates and divides.

When we feel sorry for someone, it really is an attack, because we are saying to that person: "You have successfully excluded the Love of God from your mind. You will never get it back, because you are no longer a mind. You are now a body; you are now a brain, and are at the mercy of forces beyond your control." At that point there is no hope for either you or me, because we have formed an alliance against God by joining with the ego and the body. But we have put on a pretty costume, which is what special love is. We say: "I'm concerned, and I'm filled with pity, sympathy, and kindness, because I feel for you." That doesn't help. What really helps is our reminding each other through our own peace and love that the pain, suffering, and sickness are coming from having chosen wrongly. Anything that allows us to get in touch with the power of the mind is helpful. Anything that serves to deny the power of the mind and shield it even further from our access is harmful.

True empathy reminds us of the strength that is within us. False empathy reinforces the belief that there is no strength in us. There is only a sick, weak, and suffering body, and we feel sorry for it. We do not feel sorry, generally, for people who have gotten themselves into messes. Our hearts usually go out to people whom we identify as victims, but almost never to people who are victimizers.

**(Paragraph 1 - Sentence 3) The capacity to empathize is very useful to the Holy Spirit, provided you let Him use it in His way.**

Empathizing really means joining. The Holy Spirit uses the power of our minds to join. We have used the power of our minds to join with the ego. The power of our minds to join is really the power of our minds to decide or choose. We have used it to join with the ego, to join with a limited, separated self, which automatically leads to joining in the world with other limited and separated selves who are judged to be bodies. That same power of our minds to empathize or to choose the ego can be turned around so that it serves the Holy Spirit. We join with Him and with His Love, and through that joining we join with everyone else.

**(Paragraph 1 - Sentences 4-5) His way is very different. He does not understand suffering, and would have you teach it is not understandable.**

That He does not understand suffering, an idea which is expressed other places in the Course, means that suffering, or anything of the ego, is not understandable, because it makes no sense—it's insane. It does not mean that, on another level, we do not understand the ego. A good part of the Course is spent in teaching us to understand the ego and how it functions, not by analyzing it, but simply by having us recognize that the ego represents a decision to separate ourselves from the Love of God. This we can understand. Because we can understand that we chose the ego, we can understand that we can make another choice. Suffering makes no sense because suffering upholds a thought system that does not exist. That is what is meant by saying suffering cannot be understood.

On another level, if we extrapolate from these principles, Jesus means that it makes no sense to try to understand how the world functions. I mentioned this briefly earlier, that it makes no sense to spend all of our time and energy trying to understand the physical world whether we are talking about the cosmos, the world of the body, or the world of the psychological body, namely, our psyches. Its whole purpose was to preclude our understanding, because true understanding only comes from the Holy Spirit. So suffering makes no sense, unless we understand that suffering comes from an ego decision we make to keep the truth away from us—that we can understand. Otherwise suffering makes no sense. Suffering does not occur because of a germ or a disease, or because a person has abandoned or rejected or hurt us. Suffering comes simply because we turned the wrong way.

**(Paragraph 1 - Sentences 6-7) When He relates through you, He does not relate through your ego to another ego. He does not join in pain, understanding that healing pain is not accomplished by delusional attempts to enter into it, and lighten it by sharing the delusion.**

The Holy Spirit does not have us relate to someone else's body, because if we relate from one ego to another, we are relating from one separated thought to another separated thought.

"Joining in pain" is something that we all do. In fact, there is a popular expression: "Misery loves company." When we are feeling terrible or feeling sorry for ourselves, we all experience it as a great comfort when other people join with us in that, so we do not feel we are alone. It does feel good, but what feels good is really the ego comforting itself. Generally what we experience as a comfort is other people telling us we are correct in feeling unfairly treated. What we call loving and helpful, very, very often is joining with each other on the level of misery and suffering, reinforcing the belief that yes, we are justified in feeling unfairly treated.

Now I am not talking about behavior. Many times the most loving thing I can do for you is to "join" with you on the level that you are on. But that does not mean in my mind and in my heart that I am joining with your pain. In other words, I join with you to lead you to a different place. We will discuss this more later on.

Remember, the ego made up the world as a distraction and a smokescreen and made up problems in the world to reinforce that. So our attention is then diverted away from our minds and rather is here in the world. When I join with you and make your pain and suffering real and help you to assume no responsibility for what you are feeling, I am doing exactly what the ego wants. I am making the smokescreen very real. I am saying the problem is here.

The miracle—and true empathy—help us move our attention away from the body, back to the mind. We recognize that, regardless of what you may or may not have done to me, the reason I am upset is that I made a decision to be upset. Even in the midst of what the world judges a terrible attack, I can still be peaceful. That, of course, is what Jesus taught us from the cross. No matter what was done, no matter how unfair the attack on him was, his peace and the Love of God within him was totally unaffected. The world indulged in false empathy and identified with what was perceived to be his pain and suffering, so that Christianity made a god out of the suffering, victimized Jesus. That is a wonderful example of false empathy.

Jesus was really teaching true empathy. He was asking us to join with the strength of Christ that was in him. When we identify with that strength, there can be no pain, no suffering, and no tears, because all suffering and pain come from identifying with the weakness of the ego. Suffering and pain have nothing whatsoever to do with the body. Remember, we said earlier that the body doesn't feel anything. The brain doesn't think. The eyes don't see. Pain doesn't come from the body. Pain comes from the guilt in the mind. There are no exceptions to that.

What the world did with Jesus on the cross was empathize with what was perceived to be his pain and suffering. If pain and suffering are real, the smokescreen is intact, and the true Love of God is hidden in the mind. The lesson of the cross was that we should choose true empathy by not judging based on what appeared to be the weakness of Jesus, his dying body, but rather by identifying with the strength of the love that was in his mind. That is what we are asked to do with each other.

**Part V
Commentary on the Section "True Empathy" (T-16.I)**

**(Paragraph 2 - Sentences 1-2)The clearest proof that empathy as the ego uses it is destructive lies in the fact that it is applied only to certain types of problems and in certain people. These it selects out, and joins with.**

This is one of the clearest ways of understanding the difference between false empathy and true empathy. When we feel sorry for others, our hearts go out to the particular person or the particular group, which is clearly distinguished from other persons or groups. Almost always when we identify with a group that has been unfairly treated or oppressed or a person who is in pain, someone is perceived as the victimizer who has inflicted the pain. We always see the world in terms of good and bad, good guys and bad guys, victims and victimizers. Or we see certain people who are in worse shape than others. For example, our hearts go out to the homeless—that is a group that people target these days—and not to the people who have homes, or not to the people in Washington who make the laws or do not make the laws that allow people to stay homeless. We focus on certain groups. Once we do, it is obvious what we are doing. We are separating, seeing differences, and making judgments, and judgments always involve an attack. That's false empathy. That's how you can always tell when you are listening to the ego and not to the Holy Spirit or Jesus—you will always separate out.

We do the same thing with the body. I have a pain in a particular part of my body, and so I don't pay attention to the rest of my body. If I hurt my left wrist I don't pay attention to the right one. I say it's my left wrist that is sprained or that is broken or that is causing me pain. It is this part of my body that needs attention and not another part of my body. We are doing exactly what the ego wants—we are seeing ourselves as split and fragmented. The source of my pain is not that I stepped on something and sprained my ankle, or that I fell on my wrist and broke it. The source of my pain is the guilt in my mind. It is not just one part of my body that is sick or diseased or in pain. It is everything, because my whole body comes from the thought of guilt in my mind. What we clearly do with our bodies is what we also do with everyone else's body. We feel sorry for a particular part of someone's body, or attracted to a particular part of a person's body. We feel attracted to certain bodies as opposed to other bodies, and certain groups of bodies as opposed to other groups of bodies.

We are not asked to deny our experiences, but we are asked to step back and look at the thought system that has produced such an insane experience, which always sees separation, differences, judgment, and attack. That's false empathy, and there's no joining, because we are joining with particular people who are in particularly painful situations and ignoring other people, as if certain people are better off or worse off than others. That's an example, as I mentioned earlier, of the first law of chaos, that there is a hierarchy of illusions. Once we say there is a hierarchy of illusions we are talking about ordering, differentiation, separation, and differences, all part of the world of perception. That's why the ego made up a world of perception, which the Course contrasts with knowledge, which is a synonym for Heaven.
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The ego always sees differences and makes them real. The Holy Spirit perceives the differences but knows that they are unreal and uses our perception of differences as a way of reminding us that we are all the same. On a practical level, we recognize that our interests are not separate from each other. We are not asked to deny the obvious bodily and psychological differences that exist in the world, but we are asked to begin the process of denying that our interests are separate. The ego teaches that I get home at your expense, because that's the way I left home in the first place—at God's expense. I stole from Him and ran away from Him and made up my own world. It's always kill or be killed; it's one or the other. Like a see-saw, when one goes up, the other goes down.
. . . . . . .

False empathy always chooses certain people, certain groups, or certain problems as different from others, and we establish those differences as real and important.
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**(Paragraph 2 - Sentences 6-7) You do not know what empathizing means. Yet of this you may be sure; if you will merely sit quietly by and let the Holy Spirit relate through you, you will empathize with strength, and will gain in strength and not in weakness.**

Here is that important idea that all we have to do is merely sit quietly by. We don't have to do anything. When I find myself getting upset because of your sickness or your pain, and beginning to empathize with your suffering, all I have to do is simply step back and say to Jesus or the Holy Spirit: "Ah, there it is. I'm doing it again, I'm making the error real. I'm denying the power of your mind and the power of my mind to have chosen. Please help me look at it differently." Use whatever words you want. I sit back quietly and let Him tell me what to do. I let Him guide me into what I should experience, rather than telling Him what I should do. A lot of us first define a problem out here in the world, then ask the Holy Spirit what we should do about it. That's an example of bringing the truth to the illusion, or the light to the darkness.

We say to the Holy Spirit: "There's a real problem in the Middle East. Please help me. What should I do about it?" Or, "There's this loved one who has AIDS or cancer and is dying. What should I do about it?" Or, "I have a problem of not having enough money to pay next month's rent or next month's mortgage. What should I do about it?" Or, "I feel sorry for this person and I want to help. What should I do?" Obviously we're not letting the Holy Spirit tell us, because we're telling Him. We're defining the problem. Instead, we should recognize that the problem is not out here in the world or the body. The problem is in the mind that thinks there's a problem in the world or the body. That's why the Course has that important line: "Seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world" (T-21.In.1:7).

Let's say I'm close with you and you have a problem, you're in pain, and I want to help you. Instead of asking Jesus what I should do for you, I should ask him what I should do for me. I am the one who is sick, because I believe there is a problem here. My mind has to be healed, because I'm tempted to join with your suffering and I want to do something about it here. Rather than drag Jesus down from the mind into the world and have him fix it, I want to come up to where he is, in my mind. He can't help me in the world, because if he could he would be as insane as I am, since there is no world here. Yet we always want to bring him into the world, or bring God or the Holy Spirit into the world, so that they will fix it, which is the height of arrogance. We're the ones who made the world as an attack on God, as a way of showing how much better we can do things. Then when we botch it up, we bring God into it and say, "Please, please fix this."

Instead, we want to recognize what we have done and bring the problem back to the mind, where Jesus is. That's where he helps us. We want to join first with him before we join with another person. We can recognize how easily we fall astray because we always want to join with each other, help people out, and feel sorry for them. We really need to help ourselves out. We're the ones we should feel sorry for, because we have separated from Jesus' love. Rejoining with him allows us to be truly loving and compassionate to others.

It's extremely easy to delude ourselves in this. We all tend to bring the Holy Spirit into the suffering here and have Him fix it. We don't want to ask Jesus how to help other people. That's another red flag signaling that we have fallen into the ego's trap. Whenever we ask Him what we should do for someone, or what should be done for us on the level of the body, the ego has been our companion and not the Holy Spirit. We want to ask for help that we perceive the situation differently, whether it's a perception of somebody else or a perception of ourselves. That's what we pray for. That's what the text means earlier when it says: "The only meaningful prayer is for forgiveness, because those who have been forgiven have everything"
(T-3.V.6:3). Forgiveness means changing our minds—looking past the illusion to the truth.

The holy meeting place is not what I do with you or for you. The holy meeting place is in my mind, where I join with the One, the only One, Who knows what love is, and Who knows what the end of pain is. By joining with Him, I automatically know what to do for you on the level of behavior or form that would be of help. I don't have to ask about it because it will automatically come through me.

That's what later on in the text is meant when it says that our responsibility is only to choose the miracle (T-27.V.1:2-5; T16.II.1:3-5). The extension of the miracle through us is not our responsibility. The same point is made in terms of forgiveness (T-22.VI.9:2-5). Our responsibility is to choose forgiveness. The extension of forgiveness through us is not our responsibility. Our responsibility is not to alleviate people's suffering in the world. Our responsibility is to choose to identify with that love in the mind that is the end of suffering. When we do that we've done our job. That love automatically comes through our minds, and we act and behave in a way that is truly loving. That is true empathy, because I am joined with the Love of God, with the strength of Christ in myself. From that place of love and strength in me I know that you and I are both one. We are not separate. The love and strength in me with which I have identified and joined automatically strengthens you and joins with you, because minds are joined. I've done my part, and my body will automatically do whatever would be deemed most helpful by you and for you.

If there is a problem that you think you have to solve right away, you should close the book at that point and do whatever it is you want to do—because whenever you feel there is a problem that has to be solved right away, you know you're in your ego. You obviously have made time very real and you've made something of the world very urgent. We experience this all the time. But it is possible, even in the midst of that urgency, to take out a split second—that's all it takes—to go back into the mind and say, "Please help me look at this differently," or whatever words you're going to use. But whenever you feel an urgency to do something, you know that's your ego. The ego made up time to have us feel urgent about it.

Someone recently shared an example of what we're saying about the ego's version of empathy. She spoke about her cat who had had surgery, and that when the cat came home, it limped around the house. She said her heart went out to her cat, but after a while she became aware that she herself was feeling vulnerable. She was feeling for her cat exactly what she was feeling for herself.

Now when you feel that kind of ache go through you and feel sorry for someone, you're saying, "What a terrible thing happened to you." But in our example of the cat, it was the cat who chose that. The mind that chose for the cat that it be hurt is the same mind that chose that you feel sorry for it. In other words, it seems to be loving but it's not loving at all.

At the turn of the century, Samuel Butler wrote a satire called "Erehwon," which is "nowhere" spelled backwards. As part of his utopia, he put all sick people in prison. But he also put prisoners in hospitals. So he didn't get the whole thing right, but he got at least part of it: the idea that sick people ought to be in prison because they've done something wrong. Obviously, there is a lot of judgment involved in that, but the point is that people who are sick are as guilty of attack as people who physically attack—people whom we lock up. We're choosing to be sick, seeing ourselves as separate. In back of that, we are subtly attacking other people and blaming them for that, and manipulating them, etc.

This doesn't mean that you don't take care of your sick pet or your sick parent or sick child or sick lover or sick friend or whatever. It simply means that when you have the investment in seeing others as sick and unfairly treated, and your heart goes out to them and you want to take away their pain, you're seeing something that you have put there. This leads into another point, which I was going to get into later, but it fits here appropriately.

If there is no world outside of the mind, which is the basic premise of the Course, everything that we perceive outside comes from inside, just as everything we perceive on the movie screen is nothing more than a projection of the film running through the projector. And if there is nothing outside, then there is nothing that can cause me to feel or think anything. In other words, anything that I feel or believe or think must come from within me, because there is nothing outside me. There is nothing outside my mind that can bring me pleasure; there is nothing outside my mind that can bring me pain. There is nothing outside my mind that can condemn me; there is nothing outside my mind that can save me.

Jesus and the Holy Spirit do not save us. They remind us that the choice to be saved rests within us. Any time I feel something, whether I'm feeling sorry for a sick animal, for a sick world, for a group of people who are suffering, or I'm feeling sorry for myself, or for my own body, I am the one who has put that feeling there. This highlights the importance of recognizing the Course's metaphysical teaching: There is no world. In fact, a passage in the workbook says, "There is no world! This is the central thought the course attempts to teach" (W-pI.132.6:2-3). And Jesus means that literally. Not that there is no world of cancer or no world of pain or no world of death. He means there is literally no world outside the mind. It's all a projection of a thought.

That's important because it enables me to accept full responsibility for whatever I am feeling. If I witness an awful murder and am horrified and get sick to my stomach, literally, and I turn away and then wake up night after night in nightmares, I am the one who has chosen those feelings. Not that within this dream I am responsible for the murder that I've witnessed, but I am responsible for my reaction to it. The manual says, "Remember that no one can be angry at a fact. It is always an interpretation that gives rise to negative emotions" (M-17.4:1-2). I'm not angry because I've just witnessed a murder; I'm angry at the interpretation I've given it. I am responsible for the interpretation. Metaphysically, I'm responsible for everything, because it's my dream. But on the level of our experience in this world, which is the only thing that we are interested in at the moment, I'm responsible for my reaction to what I perceive.

The reason the owner felt upset about her sick cat had nothing to do with the cat's being in pain. It had to do with her wanting to feel that her cat was a victim. She wanted to believe that suffering and pain were real in the world, and that she was someone who could do something about it. If she did not want to have that feeling she would not have had that feeling. This is extremely important. No one and nothing has the power to put anything inside our minds.

People who felt tortured and were terrified in the concentration camps believed they were not responsible for what they were feeling. They were responsible for what they were feeling. Within the world's dream, they may not have been responsible for being in the concentration camp, but they were certainly responsible for their feelings and reactions to it. We can understand this better by considering some first-hand reports of people in the concentration camps who did not feel fury and anger and shame and murderous thoughts and fear. They could be in those camps and feel as much love for the German victimizers as they could for all the seemingly innocent victims.

We are responsible for what we see. That's what that passage in the text is about, that we choose the feelings that we would experience (T-21.II.2:3-5). You then have to ask the question—we'll use the woman and her cat as an example—if her cat were not responsible for her feeling that way, who was? It had to be the woman herself. And why would she choose to make her cat's suffering real and then join with that suffering—which is false empathy? The reason is that her ego wanted to prove that the ego is real, and that the body and victimization are real.

As long as I believe that victimization in the world is real, I'm saying the problem is out here in the world and not in my mind. The ego wants me to see everything that is in my mind, but not to see it in my mind, rather to see it outside. Once I believe it is outside, my attention is riveted still further out here. I never go back within, so I never know what the problem really is. And if I don't know what the problem really is, I certainly will never know what the solution is. That's how the ego keeps the love of the Holy Spirit away.

Before her sick cat came home, the woman turned away from the Holy Spirit in her mind, dropped the hand of Jesus, turned towards the ego, and then, as we all do, let a veil of denial fall across her mind, so she forgot what she chose. The experience of feeling identified with the weak and the sick and the suffering now appears to be outside her mind, and she is in no way responsible for it. It becomes clear to her that the reason she is so sad and feels so much pain is not that she turned away from the Holy Spirit, but that there is this sick cat—outside her mind, in the world. But she went looking for that pain first. If it were not a sick cat, it would have been a sick friend or her own sick body or some situation at work, etc.

That's how the ego does its magic. We first make a decision in the mind to join with the ego instead of with the Holy Spirit, which is to join with separation, sickness, suffering, pain, and death, because that's what the ego thought system is. Then we forget that we have joined with that in our minds. The whole thing is projected outside us, and we join with sickness, separation, suffering, and pain in the body, outside us. We have no idea that we're simply joining with ourselves. It seems to be so real, but that's part of the magic. It's similar to watching a magician who is very skillful. What he does seems so real to us. It actually looks as if he's pulling a rabbit out of a hat or taking something out of his sleeve or sawing a woman in half. We would all swear that's what is happening. In reality it's not happening at all. He is just very clever at manipulating our perception, so that we look here when he's really doing something over there. That's what the ego does. It does something in the mind—it seduces us into joining with it, the "it" being a separated, limited self. Then it quickly causes our perception to go outside the mind to the world, where we join with the sickness, separation, and weakness that is outside us. We then find lots of people who agree with us.

The right-minded way for the woman to have handled the situation with her cat is exactly the way she would have handled a sick child or a sick friend or whatever. You recognize that, if you have a sick pet, that it is something you have chosen, that it is part of your classroom. If you chose it as a classroom, there are two reasons for having chosen it. One is the ego's reason, which would be to teach you about false empathy, to teach you what separation and pain are. The other is the Holy Spirit's reason and His purpose is to teach you that there is no pain and separation outside your own choice. So our friend with the sick cat, being a good Course in Miracles student now, says to the Holy Spirit, "Okay, this is a classroom I have chosen; please help me look at it differently." We always have to remain faithful to the classroom that we chose. Part of the classroom of having a pet is to take care of the pet. So she takes care of the pet as any pet owner would. But she now learns that if she's feeling sorry for the cat, the feeling sorry is coming from a choice she is making and has nothing to do with the cat's problem. So then she does what any other owner of the cat would do, but she does it without feeling sorry for the cat, without being guilty about the cat, without joining with the cat's suffering. She would look like any other cat owner. The difference would be that she would feel much more peaceful. It's important to remember that the decision initially was to join with the ego and to drop Jesus' hand. At that point, the cat came along and she could feel sorry for the cat. But if she didn't have a cat, she would have found something else, such as making herself sick, to focus outside the mind.

What she had a need for at that moment, which is a need that we all have once we drop Jesus' hand and take the ego's hand, is to find somebody we can blame for the terrible feeling that we have. When we separate ourselves from the Love of God, that's the worst feeling that anybody could have. In fact, that's the only feeling anybody could ever have. Every feeling we have in this world comes from that. And that's an awful feeling. That's a feeling of being absolutely all alone in the universe, feeling that I'll never, ever get back. I've dropped the hand of God, I've stolen from Him, He's barred me from the Kingdom, and I'll never get back home. That's awful! This whole world becomes an attempt to cover the searing pain of that choice, so that we don't feel it. But it filters through every once in awhile.

We all have the need to choose the ego and then to say: "But I'm not the one who has chosen it; someone else has done it to me." So, at the end of the Adam and Eve story, it's not Adam and Eve who leave the garden; it's God Who kicks them out. It was not their choice to disobey His will and separate from Him that led to their pain and their alienation; it was this wrathful God Who did it. It's not I who have chosen to be sick; it's some germ that has attacked me. Once I drop Jesus' hand—and this is a choice that we make every instant, either to take the hand of Jesus or to drop it, that's the only choice that we have—my ego need at the moment that I drop his hand is to find somebody I can blame for it. A convenient thing can be the sick cat. If it isn't the cat, it can be a friend, or somebody at work, or myself. It wouldn't matter either. I could turn on the television and see something that causes my heart to go out to the character, and I would feel upset. It would not make a difference.

On the other hand, if I keep the hand of Jesus, I take care of my cat, but I do it totally lovingly and peacefully, without making the error real.

**Part VI
Commentary on the Section "True Empathy" (T-16.I)**

**(Paragraph 3 - Sentence 1) Your part is only to remember this; you do not want anything you value to come of a relationship.**

This is talking about what we do in relationships. Basically, in relationships we join with people on the level of the body, either to see them as allies or to see them as enemies. Our part is simply to recognize that we do not know what is best for us. We don't have to know what is best for us, we simply have to know what is not best for us. What we're talking about is a process of undoing.

Right at the beginning we believed we knew what was best for us. We believed identifying with the ego was best for us, and joining with the Holy Spirit was not. From that point we were convinced we were right, and we just went downhill from there. We excluded any other possibility that perhaps what we are doing and perceiving and believing is wrong. Stated another way, the Course's purpose is to have us recognize that we don't know what's in our own best interests. That's an early workbook lesson (W-pI.24). All that I have to know is that I don't know what's best for me in my relationship with you. All that I know is that I don't know that. If I could at least make that beginning, then I'm starting a process where I leave a door open for the fact that there is another possibility. If I don't know what's best for me, then maybe somebody else does. Perhaps it's a fact that my being upset is not because my cat is in pain; maybe there is another cause for it. Maybe the fact that you have walked out on me is not the cause of my pain; maybe it's something else. The something else would gradually lead me to the idea that I'm the one who has chosen to feel unfairly treated, and I'm simply using what you have done, your behavior, as a way of justifying how terrible I feel.

**(Paragraph 3 - Sentences 2-3) You choose neither to hurt it nor to heal it in your own way. You do not know what healing is.**

When someone with whom you are living, whether it's your pet or it's your human pet, is in pain and you want to comfort that person in pain, what Jesus is telling us is that we don't know what comfort is, we don't know what healing is. For us, healing is usually an attempt to help somebody so we won't feel guilty.

Another way of understanding this in greater depth is that, when we are in pain, we are really doing something to manipulate the other person into feeling guilty. It's a veiled statement, sometimes not so veiled, but usually veiled, that says, "You did this to me, and you should feel guilty because I'm upset and hurt, because of this, that, and the other thing. If only you were more attentive and took better care of me, if only you did not abandon me, if only you did not abuse me, if only you did not do this, that, or the other thing, I would not be feeling what I'm feeling today."

The chances are that the person who is not feeling sick—the other person in the relationship—is already coming from an ego point of view, so that person will feel guilty. That person hears in the sickness, not only an attack, but a confirmation of what that person already feels he or she has done. Since deep down we carry within us the idea that our thoughts have attacked God and have caused Him pain—remember, that's what the ego began with—then that's a thought that is always present in us. There's a part of my ego mind that is always looking to prove that I'm guilty and sinful. So I get involved with a person who's looking to blame somebody. That's what we call psychologically a sadomasochistic relationship, where one partner is involved in sadism, which is to attack and punish somebody else, and the other is involved in masochism, which is to want to feel martyred.

So, let's say I'm involved with you, and you get sick. Part of your getting sick is to say I'm responsible for it, so you are the innocent victim. There's a part of me that is looking for you to get sick and to attack me so I can feel guilty. That's how we reinforce each other. Therefore, I want to take care of you and comfort you so I won't feel guilty; not because I care about you, not because I love you, but so I won't feel guilty. My concern is really for you to get over the pain as quickly as possible; not because I care about you, but because your pain is making me feel even more pain, it's making me feel guilty.

What I'm doing, which on the surface seems to be loving and kind and gentle and sensitive and thoughtful, is really purely selfish and self-serving. In other words, I want to help you so I won't feel guilty. This underlies much of what people do in the world in terms of what we call charity or good works. These are, as I mentioned earlier, the do-gooders. It's really an attempt to take care of other people so that I will feel better about myself. So when God comes on the Day of Judgment and looks at me, He won't see me as this miserable sinner, because I can say to God, "Look at how much I've helped other people, look how kind and concerned and good I've been; I've given of myself, I've sacrificed of myself; I'm not the bad one, it's this other person."

If I'm going to pull this off I need to have people in my life who are in trouble and whom I can take care of. When I can take care of you, I'm off the hook. And then I can say to God, "Don't punish me, I'm not the one who's sinful. It's this other person."

That's what we think of as healing, and that's what underlies the empathy of the ego. I think the problem is somehow outside and I want to see the problem as outside so that I can be the one who will fix it. That is exactly what the ego did at the beginning. It said there is a problem and I know how to fix it. The ego does it under the guise of being our friend. In reality of course it just keeps us miserable.

**(Paragraph 3 - Sentences 3-5) You do not know what healing is. All you have learned of empathy is from the past. And there is nothing from the past that you would share, for there is nothing from the past that you would keep.**

All that the ego ever learns is of the past: I know what works. I know that I could feel better if I could dump on you. I know I could feel better if I could join with you and help you out. I know how to manipulate you because this has worked in the past. If I get sick I know that you'll feel guilty and you'll feel sorry and you'll take care of me, which is what I want. Everything the ego has ever done is based on the past. The whole concept of sin is based on the past: I have sinned in the past; I attacked God, I stole from Him, I raped Him, I killed Him, I usurped His role. I did all this in the past, for which I should feel guilty now. I'm now terrified of God's punishment, which will come in the future, unless I do something about it. That's the whole notion of time according to the ego. It's always based on the past: I know I will be mistreated, I know I will be abandoned, I know people will take advantage of me, because that's what always happens. And I have a whole list of past experiences which support that. What's going to happen today will have to end up in a failure because it always is that way. I just look in the past and I see that. The Holy Spirit only lives in the present, because there is no past. There is no sin. There is no past or future. Everything that I've ever learned in terms of behavior is based on the past. That's why there is nothing from the past that I would share or would keep: because everything in the past has been an attack and a sin.

**(Paragraph 3 - Sentence 6) Do not use empathy to make the past real, and so perpetuate it.**

We use empathy to make the past real by making suffering, sickness, injustice, and victimization real. We've done all that because we made the original injustice, the original judgment, and the original attack real. We believe we did that to God, and we simply relive it over and over again. We each have an investment in reliving it—that's what is really important. Because if I can demonstrate right now that people are unfairly treated, and wounded and hurt and suffering pain, and I can be of help to them, then I'm proving that the ego thought system is real. As long as I identify with the ego, I am going to identify with the need to keep that thought system real, which keeps the Love of God unreal.

**(Paragraph 3 - Sentence 7) Step gently aside, and let healing be done for you.**

This is the same idea as the workbook lesson that says, "I will step back and let Him lead the way" (W-pI.155). In terms of the **chart**, the "stepping back" is almost literally stepping away from the ego and stepping towards the Holy Spirit. The only problem that has ever existed and will ever exist in the world is that we stepped towards the ego. So the only way of solving any problem is to step away from the ego and towards the Holy Spirit. That's the only way that we can find peace.

We don't have to solve problems in the world because there are no problems in the world, because there is no world. We solve the seeming problems in the world by bringing those problems back to the mind and solving the problem there. And the only problem is that we separated from the Love of God, and so the solution is that we join with it.

We don't have to heal; we let healing be done for us. The section in the text on the unhealed healer says, "A therapist does not heal; he lets healing be" (T-9.V.8:1). The healing is done through us. We are not the ones who have to solve problems. The woman is not the one who has to take care of her cat. A parent is not the one who has to take care of his kids. Our job is not to be good parents or good teachers or good therapists or good A Course in Miracles teachers or good accountants or good lawyers or good anything. Our job is to rejoin the love of the Holy Spirit in the mind, and that love will automatically come through us. For us to believe we know how to do anything is the height of arrogance. That's what we did right at the beginning. We said to God: "I know how to do it better than you. Your world is boring, I'm going to make a world where there's some excitement, where there's some real pleasure, not this airy-fairy, spiritual stuff."

Someone else talked recently of an experience she had had, when, on a cold and rainy night she began to think of all the stray cats and other animals who are out suffering alone in the cruel weather conditions. This woman said that in the past she would have simply prayed to God to take care of all these poor little animals, but now, as a student of the Course, she couldn't do that. But she wanted to know if she was really experiencing her own concern that she's not going to be taken care of.

This actually represented an advance for her, because in the past she had simply said, well, God will take care of them, so I don't have to deal with that problem. Now she was saying that God is not going to take care of them so she has to deal with the problem, which forced her to look, not so much at the stray cats, but at the stray cat she believed she was, which is a much more painful experience, because there is no magical cloak to put over it. The next step would be realizing that it was not the stray cats whom she was worrying about, or feeling were victimized; it was herself.

The good news is that God is not going to do anything about that. It's good news because that forces us to say: "I'm the one who has chosen to see myself as a victim so I could do something about that. And God will help me change my mind about myself. He won't do anything about the stray cats outside." There aren't any stray cats outside anyway. They're just symbols. Nor will He do anything about the stray cat I believe I am as a physical person, as a body. But He will do something, through the Holy Spirit, with the mind that thought that I'm a stray cat.

The ego gives us the arrogance to believe we know what is best. We know what is best for God, we know what is best for ourselves, and we know what's best for everybody else. And we know this because we know what healing is, we know what help is. The Course helps us to recognize that, from the ego's point of view, help is what will help me. And what will help me is what will bury my guilt even further. I'm not interested in looking at my guilt and letting it go, because that's true help. I'm interested in seeing my guilt in you, in what you have done, in terms of your being sick. Then I'll change what you have done by helping you with it, so my guilt will go away. But I'm not interested in looking at the guilt in my mind, I'm not interested in looking at the investment I have in seeing you in pain. All I'm interested in is seeing the symbol of my guilt taken away. It may be taken away on the level of form, but the thought in my mind still stays. True empathy helps me let go of the source of my guilt; false empathy reinforces it.

**(Paragraph 3 - Sentence 8) Keep but one thought in mind and do not lose sight of it, however tempted you may be to judge any situation, and to determine your response by judging it.**

We judge a situation, which always involves separation, difference, judgment, and attack. The situation is that you are in need of help. By my judgment of that, I am now going to determine what my response will be: I will help you, or I will walk away from you because I'll say you deserve to be in pain. Either way, it's opposite sides of the same coin. I'm seeing separation and pain as real.

Here is what we are asked to do:

**(Paragraph 3 - Sentences 9-10) Focus your mind only on this: I am not alone, and I would not intrude the past upon my Guest.**

Let me stop with that. The fundamental ego teaching is that we are alone—we have separated ourselves from God. He is a virtual non-entity in our life and we are on our own. "On our own" doesn't mean we are without the ego. To say that I am not alone means I am not without God. The ego tells me I am alone, which means I am without God, I am without the Holy Spirit, and my only friend is the ego. I project that out into the world. My only friends are other egos or other bodies.

Now, when we say that "I would not intrude the past upon my Guest," my past is always one of sin, and we intrude that sin upon the Holy Spirit—the Holy Spirit obviously is the Guest, that's why it's with a capital "G". Then because I've sinned in the past, I deserve to be punished in the future. My perception of the Holy Spirit is not of this loving presence of God's Love in my mind. It's of this wrathful presence of God in my mind, because I've projected my sin onto Him. I no longer accept the Holy Spirit as He is, which is the memory of God's Love. I see the Holy Spirit as I want Him to be, and the "I" that wants Him to be this way is the "I" that has become the ego. The ego wants the Holy Spirit to be an angry, wrathful presence. And so that's what I do: I intrude the past upon my Guest.

**(Paragraph 3 - Sentences 11-12) I have invited Him, and He is here. I need do nothing except not to interfere.**

I recognize that I am upset—whether I'm upset because of my suffering and pain, or because of your suffering and pain—because I have disinvited the Holy Spirit. I have therefore alienated myself from Him. I am alone with this thought system which is predicated on aloneness—that's what separation is. And that's the problem. If I recognize that's the problem and I change my mind, that changing my mind is the invitation to the Holy Spirit. Then I recognize that I don't have to do anything with the situation, because nothing has to be done, there is no problem here. All I have to do is to step back and not interfere with that flow of love that is within me. As long as I believe I am here, that love will flow from my mind into the dream, and I will automatically know what I should do.

To use the example of the stray cats—rather than feel sorry for the stray cats or that I am responsible for them, I would realize I am seeing the stray cats in the rainstorm as a problem because I have separated myself from the Holy Spirit or Jesus. If I looked at those cats with Jesus, I would look at the whole thing differently. I would realize that what I am seeing in them is a projection of myself, and that I am not a stray any more than they are. I have given the objective fact of the stray cats within the dream a meaning it doesn't have. The meaning I have given those stray cats is that they are innocent victims of a cold, heartless, cruel world that God doesn't care about. That's the interpretation I have given the situation.

I can give it another interpretation—I can see the stray cats as a mirror of myself. I believe I am a stray and that I am all alone in a world that doesn't care about me, a world that is governed by a God Who doesn't care about me. Once I see it that I am giving it that meaning, then I can change that meaning. I can say: That is how my ego sees things, because that is what my ego is—a belief that I am separated from God and alone. I could just as well join with Jesus or the Holy Spirit and, through joining with Their love, I would then look at myself and the stray cats differently.

This basically is what the whole mind training of the Course is about—I find myself getting caught up with the drama of the world, regardless of the form, whether it's a drama that involves my own body and my own life, or the life of someone I love or someone out in the world whom I don't even know. I know I'm getting caught when I find myself seeing separation and difference, and making judgments. It's not too difficult to begin to train my mind to see that. I don't necessarily have to let go of the belief, but I can recognize when I'm seeing differences. When I feel sorry for someone, obviously I am seeing that person as different from me or from other people. When that begins to happen I can then say a prayer such as these lines, realizing that I am feeling this way because I pushed the Holy Spirit away, and that I can really feel different if I invite Him back in. From that place of love in my mind, from that meeting place that we talked about earlier, I would automatically know the most loving response in terms of form. This requires a lot of discipline, a lot of practice, a lot of mind training. That's why the Course refers to itself as mind training. It's a totally different way of looking at absolutely everything in the world, without exception. Any time I feel myself identifying with anybody's pain or suffering, or joy, it's because I'm seeing that person as different. I'm seeing through the eyes of the ego and I will never find real peace.

**Part VII
Commentary on the Section "True Empathy" (T-16.I)**

**(Paragraph 4 - Sentences 1-2) True empathy is of Him Who knows what it is. You will learn His interpretation of it if you let Him use your capacity for strength, and not for weakness.**

True empathy is always a lack of differences; it's always true joining. The onus is always placed upon us. It is not the Holy Spirit's responsibility; it is my responsibility. I must let Him teach me the proper way of looking at this situation. I have used the power of my mind for weakness, and have reinforced it through seeing weakness in everyone else. The Holy Spirit will use that power to join with Him, so my perceptions are based upon strength instead of weakness.

Let's look in the teacher's manual at a particularly difficult passage that is an answer to the question: **"Should healing be repeated?" (M-7)** The question is based on the idea that someone is sick, and I have had a healing thought, that is, I don't buy into the sickness. But the symptom stays, and then I say, "Oh, this didn't work. I should do it again." I'm obviously still seeing the sickness as resting in the physical symptom.

**(M-7 - Paragraph 4 - Sentences 1-5) One of the most difficult temptations to recognize is that to doubt a healing because of the appearance of continuing symptoms is a mistake in the form of lack of trust. As such it is an attack. Usually it seems to be just the opposite. It does appear unreasonable at first to be told that continued concern is attack. It has all the appearances of love.**

This is exactly what we've been talking about. When I believe there is a problem in you that has to be solved or you won't be peaceful—which is another way of saying that if your problem is not resolved I won't be peaceful—I'm once again seeing the problem as external. I'm seeing the thought of separation as real, I'm seeing you as different and separate from me, and I'm judging that. There is no love in that. By empathizing with your pain and suffering, I'm identifying with weakness, and reinforcing a belief in differences. That's what this means; it doesn't seem to be that "continued concern" is really an attack, because it looks like love.

**(M-7 - Paragraph 4 - Sentence 6) Yet love without trust is impossible, and doubt and trust cannot coexist.**

One way of understanding what the Course means by "trust"—a word which is used often—is that no matter what my ego has done and no matter what your ego has done, the Love of Christ has not been changed at all. That's what trust is. To have listened to the Holy Spirit right at the beginning would have been to say: I trust what You are saying. Despite all these thoughts that I'm having, I realize they have had no effect upon the reality of God; they have had no effect on the reality of myself as God's child. Despite all the cacophony and the dissonance that I believe is so real, "not one note in Heaven's song has been missed." Nothing has happened.

"Trust" in this world, in our experience here, would be knowing that no matter what is going on within you, no matter what is going on within me, the light of Christ that joins us both as one has not been changed; it has not been severed. Nothing has altered the fact that you and I are both children of the same Father. That is what trust is.

When the Course says "I trust my brothers who are one with me" (W-pI.181.Heading,6:5; W-pI.rIV.201.1:1), it does not mean that we trust their egos. Don't ever take anything in the Course to mean that you should trust people's egos. Jesus says, "Frightened people can be vicious" (T-3.I.4:2). What he's saying is: Trust that, regardless of what another ego is doing to you, or what your ego is doing, it has no effect upon our shared reality as love. Another way to say it is: I trust that no matter what you are doing to me or to my loved ones, the peace of God within me is not being affected. If I choose to identify with the love of Jesus, no matter what you do, it will have no effect on me. That's what trust is.

In the specific context of this passage it means that I trust that regardless of the fact that your body may have AIDS and may be dying, despite all the pain that I perceive you in, it is having no effect on the fact that your mind is still totally joined with me, that your mind is still at one with God, and that all of this is nothing more than a dream. It doesn't mean that I don't pay attention to you, or do things behaviorally, but I don't let what is happening to you have any effect on the love and the peace of God inside me. If it does have an effect, then I'm giving you a power over me that you don't have.

If I let your problem have an effect on me, one of the forms of which would be that I am concerned and upset and I can't sleep at night because I'm worrying about you, then I am saying: "You, not I, have the power to take the peace of God away from me. My mind is not powerful enough to take away the peace of God; yourmind is." In other words, I am impotent, I am weak. The very thing that can save me I have now said has no power.

By saying I am concerned about you and upset by what you're going through, I'm giving you the power to take God's peace away from me, which means I am not able to accept responsibility for my own choice to separate myself from the Love of God; I'm dumping that responsibility onto you. That is not loving. I want the blame to rest on you so I can go before God and say, "The reason I'm so unhappy and miserable and separate from You is not a decision I have made for which I am responsible. It's something somebody else did to me, and that's why I'm upset and why I don't feel Your Love."

The same dynamic is in force when there's an apparent healing. Someone gave a personal example of working with people who are going into surgery for a transplant and then getting very excited when the operation has been successful.

It's the exact same thing. What I'm saying in this example is that something outside me has the power to make me happy. If the operation doesn't work, I will feel bad. I'll feel guilty, responsible, sorry, etc. If the operation succeeds, then I'll feel happy. I'm letting my peace of mind and the Love of God within me rest upon a whim, whether it's the doctor, God, or the patient doesn't matter. I have now seen myself as a victim who simply has to stand by waiting to see if this person will be healed physically or not. There's no love in that, because I am allowing myself to be dependent on somebody else. I will love the person if he gets well, I will hate him if he doesn't. That's the way we function most of the time, but there's no love in that. I am denigrating and depreciating the power of my mind, and I'm giving that power to somebody else. If that person has the power I don't have, then by the laws of specialness, which are the laws that govern everything in this world, I must hate him for it. Then I say, "Why does he have that power and I don't? Not because I gave it to him, but because he took it from me. Therefore, he deserves my attack so I can get it back from him."

That's what, on a totally different level, is meant by the axiom "dependency breeds contempt." We hate the people we are dependent on, because we feel our salvation rests on them. They have the power to make me happy or sad. That they have the power and I don't is a reliving of the original moment when I looked at God and said, "He has the power I don't have. And why does He have it and I don't? Because He took it from me. Therefore I'm justified in hating Him and stealing it back from Him." That's what we relive over and over again. So I pray for you, I minister to you, I take care of you, and if you feel good and you get better, then I feel fine. If you don't, I feel terrible. Thus I place myself at your mercy, which is not a very nice place to be. Again, to have concern is not love; it is really an attack.
. . . . . . .

Let's go back to **"True Empathy"** in the text now.

**(Paragraph 4 - Sentence 5) You are not sure that He will do His part, because you have never yet done yours completely.**

This is why we do not trust Jesus, why we don't trust the Holy Spirit, or the Course, and why we complain that all we get are a lot of empty promises—this Course doesn't do what it claims it will do, I'm not feeling any better, etc. All this, of course, is a projection of the fact that we believe we have failed God. We accuse ourselves of having turned our backs on Him. And because of that we project the blame onto Him and say, "He has turned His back on me."

Whenever you begin to doubt what the Course is teaching you, or what your experiences of Jesus or the Holy Spirit are, and you feel somehow that you'll do better on your own, you are reflecting the original ego thought: I will do better on my own; I don't need God. Our doubts about the Holy Spirit's efficacy in helping us have nothing to do with Him; they have to do with our own fear, coming from our belief that we have failed Him.

Once again, this is what we always do. We turn our backs on the Holy Spirit or Jesus, and then we believe other people are doing it to us. Since we believe we stole the Kingdom from God, we must therefore believe God is going to try to steal it back from us, a thought so horrible that there's no way we can look at it, so we blot it all out. But we project it out into the world, so it appears as if the world is out to steal the Kingdom from us. People are out to take things from me. The government will steal from me; the I.R.S. will steal from me; my bosses will steal from me; my friends will steal from me. If I'm not careful, people are going to steal the love and the peace that is inside me. These thoughts are all coming from the underlying belief that I don't want to look at, that I am the one who stole first.

A line in the text that comes at the end of the section on the dynamics of the ego says "If he [your brother] speaks not of Christ to you, you spoke not of Christ to him" (T-11.V.18:6). This does not mean that I am responsible for your attack thoughts or un-Christlike thoughts against me. It means that if I perceive you as speaking in an un-Christlike, unloving way to me, it's because I accuse myself of first having spoken in an un-Christlike way to you. It doesn't mean that I deny what your ego does. But when I make what your ego does real and accuse you of being un-Christlike to me, it is because I'm secretly accusing myself of doing the same thing.
. . . . .

When we live in the real world, which is the end of all this, and everything in us is absolutely constant, and we walk always with the Love of the Holy Spirit within us—in fact, we have become that Love—then nothing that happens in the world will shake that Love from us. It doesn't mean that we can't walk along in the world and have the kind of superficial preferences and reactions everybody has, but all of it will remain just that—superficial. Nothing that we perceive or see in the world will take away that deep sense of certainty of God's Love and God's peace inside of us.

So if something happens in the world and I feel upset, it's not because of what happened in the world, whether it's the world at large or my personal world. It's because I let it have an effect on me. I gave away the power of my mind—I gave away the Love of God in my mind, and I'm responsible for that.

**(Paragraph 4 - Sentences 6-7) You cannot know how to respond to what you do not understand. Be tempted not in this, and yield not to the ego's triumphant use of empathy for its glory.**

These are very strong statements. A little later in this chapter there are two very powerful sections on special relationships (T-16.IV,V). One of them talks about how, whenever we are involved in specialness with another, we are using that as a way of triumphing once again over God (T-16.V.10:1). Every time we get what we want from somebody, and there's that sense of triumph, it's because secretly the ego has jumped up and down and said: "Ah, you see, I've done it again. I've gotten what I wanted from Heaven. I don't care about God. I don't care about the Christ that has been shattered, because I got what I wanted." Joy comes when we get what we want from another.

So, in our earlier example, if I feel really glad when a patient has been healed, and an operation has worked, it's because once again, my ego is saying: "I have triumphed over God; I have gotten what I've wanted; it's outside me." That's what this is about.

When I feel good and miserable because you are good and miserable, my ego is triumphing in glory, because I'm making the body real; I'm making the ego thought system real. And once again I'm pushing God to the background. That's where the good feeling comes from. The good feeling comes from the fact that I have once again stolen from the outside and brought it inside. It can be a good feeling because of something that I'm eating, or a good feeling that comes because I've gotten something in the world that I've wanted—the promotion, the raise, the car, or the house, the patient healed, etc. We feel good where, beforehand, we did not feel good.

Happiness and peace and the Love and joy of God are a constant state. Happiness and peace and love and joy of the ego are not constant. They rise and fall based upon circumstances. If the stock market goes up I feel good; if it goes down I feel terrible. My happiness and peace depend on something external to me. The good feeling comes because I once again have succeeded in stealing from outside to get what I want to make me happy. That's where the triumph and the glory come from.

Someone, referring to herself as a "professional do-gooder," was speaking about her experience as a social worker, working with drug-addicted, homeless people with AIDS. She was wondering if she chose to work with this group to reinforce her guilt. Well, of course the ego would do that. But the Holy Spirit joins us in the classroom. The Course talks about how what we made to harm, the Holy Spirit uses to heal. Jesus explains how the Holy Spirit never takes the special relationship away from us. He transforms it. So, yes, the ego would use that work as a way of making me feel guilty, choosing up sides, having good guys and bad guys, and feeling as if I'm better than God; I love all these people much more than Jesus does. He doesn't give a damn about them; he doesn't even know about them. But I do, and I'm going to go on my shining white horse and save them, etc. That's what the ego would do.

Jesus can use the same situation to teach me that there are no differences. Whether a person is homeless or has a home, whether a person has AIDS or doesn't have AIDS, is addicted to drugs or not, makes no difference in the eyes of the Kingdom. What I will learn over a period of time, then, is that I can be as loving to the homeless, drug-addicted people with AIDS as I can be to all the normal people. I can be as loving to my students, my family members, and my friends as I can be to these poor victims; there is no difference. As I learn that lesson, the Holy Spirit turns the tables on the ego. What the ego used for separation, I now will use as a classroom in which I learn what joining is.

To question my motivation for choosing this work situation after I'm in it is irrelevant. Yes, this is my classroom, just as being born into the body of one sex instead of the other is my classroom. Big deal. That's what it is. Once I'm here in the classroom, it is neutral. We can understand the body on two levels. On the metaphysical level, the body is the symbol of sin, guilt, and attack. On level two, which is the experience we have within the dream, the body is neutral. So on the one hand, the Course says the world was made as an attack on God; it says the body was made as a limitation on love. That's what I call a "Level One" statement. Then the workbook says, "My body is a wholly neutral thing" (W-pII.294). Once I'm here in this classroom, my body is neutral. It can serve either the purpose of the ego or the purpose of the Holy Spirit. I have the choice of which teacher I want to instruct me in this classroom.

So the fact of the matter is that I am a social worker who is dealing with these particular groups. The question now is: Do I let the ego guide me from day to day, or do I let the Holy Spirit guide me? What the ego made to kill and attack and separate, the Holy Spirit uses as an instrument for teaching us what forgiveness and joining are.

**Part VIII
Commentary on the Section "True Empathy" (T-16.I)**

**(Paragraph 5 - Sentence 1) The triumph of weakness is not what you would offer to a brother.**

The word "triumph" here is important and is central later on when the Course talks about special relationships. Basically, when I feel sorry for you, am concerned for you, want to help you, and am empathizing with you from the ego's point of view, I'm really joining with you in an alliance against God.

Lesson 190 "I choose the joy of God instead of pain" states: "If God is real, there is no pain. If pain is real, there is no God" (3:3-4). They are mutually exclusive states. If one is true, the other is not true. If I choose to identify with my ego there is no Holy Spirit in my mind at that moment. If I choose to identify with the Holy Spirit, the ego disappears.

Pain is an inherent part of the ego system. There is the original pain of feeling separated from our Source and cut off from our Home, which gets translated by the ego into sin, guilt, and fear of punishment—all of which end up in the body. There's either the pain of the ego or the Love of God—it is one or the other. I'm the one who chooses. If I choose pain, it's because I feel God is the enemy. Pain then becomes a way of keeping God away from me. Choosing God, choosing to identify with the Holy Spirit, is a way of keeping the ego away. But it is one or the other.

When I choose to identify with you and with your pain, weakness, and littleness, I'm joining with you in our war against God, because I'm saying pain is real. Even more to the point, what I'm saying is Jesus won't help you, but I will. This is a reflection of the original ego thought that says to me: "The Holy Spirit won't help you; I will help you. If you join with the Holy Spirit, He will destroy you. If you join with me, I will hide with you away from the wrath of God, and we'll be safe."

That's the original ego thought: God won't help you—He is angry; I will help you. In this world, that translates to: Jesus won't help you, I will help you. Jesus won't help you because either he's angry at you, or he's too busy, he's too indifferent or too insensitive, or he doesn't even know about this; but I will help you. I am using you as a way of triumphing over him. I'm using you as a way of proving, again, that I am greater than God. I am more loving than God; I am more concerned than God, etc. That is what all of this is about.

**(Paragraph 5 - Sentence 2) And yet you recognize no triumph but this.**

We don't know how to be in this world except through specialness. That's what the world is, that's what the ego is—a belief in specialness. I am more special than God, and I have to make a bargain with Him so that He won't be angry with me. The whole world is based on that. We are all very good at that. We are all very good at knowing how to manipulate other people so we get what we want.

As infants we learn very quickly that if we want to be fed we make a racket—we start crying. If we want to be changed, we cry, and it almost always works. We know that if we want our parents' attention, we smile, because parents love little babies who smile at them. Then our parents won't feel guilty for what they believe they've done in usurping God's power to create—because babies are a symbol of what we've done against God. We learn that the way we can get what we want is to make other people feel good. So we learn very quickly what will make other people feel good, and then we give it to them so we will get what we want. That's specialness, that's triumphing, and that's what we all know about. We don't know about the other way. The ego says: "If you don't do such and such a thing, then you're not going to get what you want. This person won't pay any attention to you, or this person will not pay you unless you sell something. And if you don't get what you want, how will you exist?" The only way we can exist and survive is through specialness. And we're all very, very good at that. We don't know about the other way. Recognizing that helps us understand why this takes time. We begin step by step. I realize I could really be happy in a relationship with this person without having to sell my soul for it. I don't have to keep on indulging in these weird bargains of the ego.

**(Paragraph 5 - Sentence 3) This is not knowledge** [in other words, this kind of joining is not of God or the Holy Spirit]**, and the form of empathy which would bring this about is so distorted that it would imprison what it would release.**

We want to believe that by joining with people through feeling sorry for them, we are really joining and expressing love. There's the magical hope that by joining with another body I will undo the tremendous guilt that came from my separating. Rather than undo the thought in my mind, I try to undo it where the thought is not. I believe that by being a good person here, by being concerned and loving and kind and thoughtful, by doing good in the world and making people feel happy, I can go to God and say: "I am not a bad person. I am not this sinful person. I am really a good person. I am this loving person; look at how many people I've saved today."

We want to join through the body without realizing that that is not going to release us from our guilt. Rather it imprisons us still further in our guilt. The real source of guilt in my mind, the thought of having separated from the Love of God, stays put. We have the magical hope we have taken care of the problem when we haven't done anything with it at all. The problem still stays in my mind; we have just solved it over here. That is what the Course means when it says, "The ego's maxim [is] 'Seek but do not find'" (T-16.V.6:5). We are always seeking the solution to problems that do not exist. And we think we solve them here.

So I save you today, and I feel wonderful. But I have to do the same damn thing again tomorrow. I have to save you again tomorrow, or save another person tomorrow, because my guilt is always there. There's always that need to join with other people's misery, to help them and to save them. That's the big temptation of people who do psychotherapy. Because of the very nature of psychotherapy, the therapist is dealing with people who have problems and the therapist knows the answer.

**(Paragraph 5 - Sentences 4-5) The unredeemed cannot redeem, yet they have a Redeemer** [the Holy Spirit]**. Attempt to teach Him not.**

In other words, as long as I believe that I am separate from love, how can I possibly love? As long as I believe that I have not joined with the Love of God within me, how can I possibly be an instrument of joining with anybody else? By the way, in earlier editions, "Him" was not capitalized—it should be a capital "H". This is saying that we shouldn't try to teach the Holy Spirit. But that's what we are always doing; we are trying to teach the Holy Spirit how He should love, how He should help people. This is the whole insane idea of praying to God for other people. The underlying premise is that if we don't tell God to help this sick person, He isn't going to know about this person. So we pray to God that He will intercede for this person who is sick, or for this problem in the world, or that He will help us find a cure for cancer, etc.

In other words, we have to teach the Holy Spirit how to do His job. Of course, that is another example of the arrogance of the ego. We should all be very glad and grateful that the Holy Spirit doesn't pay one bit of attention to what we say to Him, because if He did He would be as insane as we are. The Holy Spirit knows that the answer to our prayers lies in our coming with Him and to Him in the mind. The problem is not the person who is dying of cancer. The problem is my concern over the person who is dying of cancer. I don't ask the Holy Spirit to intercede to fix a body. I ask the Holy Spirit—which really means I ask myself to join with the Holy Spirit—to fix my mind that thinks there's a problem.

A passage later in the text says that the miracle teaches us it is not the body that is sick; it is the mind that is sick that thinks the body is sick (T-28.II.11:6-7). That is where the sickness is. We don't ask the Holy Spirit what to do; we don't have to teach Him how to pay attention to a world that He doesn't even recognize. We have to join with Him so we can share His vision and realize the problem is not out here. I don't want to join with the sickness. I want to join with the love in my mind that is the end of the sickness.

**(Paragraph 5 - Sentence 6) You are the learner; He the Teacher.**

Of course that's another thing that the ego does not like, because this really is another way of saying that God is the Creator, we are the created. We don't like that, because we don't like to be in second place. So that is exactly where we place the Holy Spirit. But if we are good students of the Course, we cannot let it look like that, so we are always asking the Holy Spirit what to do. However, we are always asking Him what to do about a specific thing, which means we structure what the problem is and then ask His help to solve that problem—and we get angry when He does not solve it for us.

We are the ones who have to learn that we do not understand anything. That is what these paragraphs have been saying. We understand absolutely nothing. We especially do not understand what the problems are, because we think the problems all have to do with the body. We think the problems have to do with the people who are homeless, or the people who have AIDS, or the people who are addicts, or the people who make war on other countries. We think we know what the problems are. None of these is the problem. We think that the problem is the budget and the scarcity in the United States Treasury. That is not the problem. The problem is the scarcity that is in our minds. We are always asking the Holy Spirit to help us with the problems of the world.

"You are the learner, He the Teacher" means that we should not presume to know or to understand what has to be done. What we want to learn from Him is to recognize where the problem really is: in the mind. We want to understand that joining is not of one body with another; joining is with Him.

**(Paragraph 5 - Sentence 7) Do not confuse your role with His, for this will never bring peace to anyone.**

This is also a major theme which comes up later in the text, in the section called "The Little Willingness" (T-18.VIII). We are always confusing our role with His. Someone who is a do-gooder is someone who is usurping God's role.

Everybody does this—parents, teachers, friends—we all do it. We all confuse our role. In fact, that is one of the important themes in the Psychotherapy pamphlet, which says that there is one basic error the advanced therapist never makes—he never confuses his role with God's. Feeling we have an answer that someone else does not have is what this is talking about.

This does not mean on the level of form. If I am a teacher in a school, and I am teaching children how to read and write and how to understand things, obviously I have a lot of answers they do not have on the level of form. That is not what this is talking about. I do not have the answer to the peace of God. It does not mean that a therapist does not give advice to a patient or help a person with the expertise the therapist has that the patient lacks. It means that the therapist does not make that difference into a big deal. If I know how to fix something or I have a piece of information you do not have, it means I do not let the information or the knowledge that you lack make any difference in terms of our both being one in God. The fact that I have information you lack does not justify a judgment against you that keeps me believing that we are separate because I am better.

When Jesus says, "Do not confuse your role with His [the Holy Spirit's]," he means don't presume that we know what the problem is, and therefore that we know what the solution is. Our job is not to solve problems. Our responsibility is simply to bring all the seeming problems to him. Our responsibility is simply to undo our belief that we are right and God is wrong. This is not a course in doing—it is a course in undoing. It is a course in looking at the ego thought system and saying, "I made a mistake." In that important line Jesus asks, "Do you prefer that you be right or happy?" (T-29.VII.1:9). We all want to be right, because that is what proves that we were right in the beginning when we chose the ego over the Holy Spirit.

When we feel that we are right in understanding a person's problem, or a social problem that needs a solution, then we know that we are wrong. Now, we may have a certain idea about the problem, but when we become invested in the idea and identified with the thought, for example, that we know what's wrong and those stupid people in Washington don't know what is wrong, then we realize we are into separation, difference, judgment, and attack. At that point, everybody is wrong.

Now this does not mean that I am indifferent to the plight of others, although it depends on what I mean by "indifference." With the indifference of the ego, which really is a subtle form of attack, I turn my back on your suffering. And if I am A Course in Miracles' student, I could use the Course to justify that. In contrast, the indifference that the Course would talk about in a positive way is indifference to any specific form of suffering, but not indifference on the level of content, because I am aware that the suffering on the level of form is not the problem. Suffering on the level of content is that you are suffering because you believe you are separated from God. I am suffering from the same problem. By ministering to you on the level of form and joining with you, what I am really doing, if I am doing this right, is joining with myself. The indifference of the Holy Spirit is indifference to the form but not to the content. The ego is really indifferent to both. Doing the Course right, as we will see as we continue, does not mean that I turn my back on people's suffering, or that I do not do something for the homeless or the people with AIDS or addicts, or sick cats, or whatever. It does not mean that I turn my back at all. It means that I can be more fully present to you, because I am indifferent to the formof suffering. I realize that the form is simply a cover for the underlying content that everyone shares. Because we all share the same content, there's no separating out one group from another.

Often these days, people with AIDS have become the saints for many New Age groups, and even people involved with the Course. These are the people, it is said, who give everybody a wonderful chance to learn how we are not victims, as they learn they are not victims. But it is as if there is something almost special about them. Similarly, many years ago, when R. D. Laing did his work with schizophrenics, it became a temptation for people to think the schizophrenics were the saints because they were closer in touch with what was true. That's absurd! The idea is you form special groups, so now those with AIDS are everybody's darlings. The thought seems to be that we are really going to advance spiritually because we are going to give our lives to those who have AIDS. There is nothing wrong with that, but how about the people who have stubbed toes or ingrown toe nails? They believe that they are bodies, too. If my mind is healed, I am indifferent to the forms that suffering takes, because I realize the underlying content—just being in this world is suffering.

**(Paragraph 5 - Sentences 8-9) Offer your empathy to Him** [the Holy Spirit] **for it His perception and Hisstrength that you would share. And let Him offer you His strength and His perception, to be shared through you.**

We do not want the perception of the ego, the perception of weakness, of people in pain and in trouble; rather, we want the Holy Spirit's perception, His Love and His strength. I first want to share my perception with Him, so I join with Him, and then, inevitably and automatically, that joining with the Love and strength of the Holy Spirit in my mind will extend to everyone else.

The Course explains that a fundamental characteristic of the mind is that whatever is within it must be projected outside. If I join with the ego, I join with separation, littleness, weakness, and guilt. They must then be projected out, giving rise to a world of littleness, weakness, and guilt. If I join with the Love of the Holy Spirit or Jesus in my mind, then that love will automatically extend through my mind.

Projection and extension are the exact same dynamic. The difference is that projection begins with guilt and extension begins with love. But the process is the same. I look within and what I see within is what I will experience without. If I look within and see guilt, separation, and weakness, that is what I will experience outside. If I look within and see the love, peace, and strength of Christ, that is what I will experience outside.

**Part IX
Commentary on the Section "The Agreement to Join" (T-28.III)**

We are going to turn now to the section "The Agreement to Join" (T-28.III). Let me say a few words first, before we start this. The three sections, "The Agreement to Join," "The Greater Joining," and "The Alternate to Dreams of Fear" in Chapter 28, directly follow a section called "Reversing Effect and Cause." The basic theme of this part of the text is cause and effect. These sections, which focus largely on sickness and what it means to join and what it means not to join, are all based on this treatment and understanding of cause and effect. I would like to start by summarizing that a little, which will make it easier for us when we go into these sections.

Understanding the Course's view of cause and effect is just another way of understanding the whole thought system and why Jesus repeatedly tells us how very simple his Course is. It is simple because it sees every problem as having the same cause. That is why the first principle of miracles, that there is no order of difficulty among them (T-1.I.1:1), is so essential. There is no order of difficulty among miracles because every one is the same.

The basic cause of everything in this world is the belief in our being separate. To state it even more clearly: The basic cause of everything in this world is our choosing to identify with the ego instead of with the Holy Spirit. This means that the cause, or the problem, is not the separation; it is the belief in the separation. There is a big difference, because the separation itself never truly happened. So how could it be a problem? It is the belief in the separation that is the problem. In other words, everything within the ego thought system is unreal, and it would have no effect unless we chose to identify with it. The cause is the decision maker choosing to listen to the voice of the ego instead of the Holy Spirit. That's the basic cause of everything. As we've seen, once we identify with the ego thought system, we also identify with its fear of God, which causes us to defend against that fear by making up a world in which this thought system simply gets played out over and over again. So the way to solve any problem in the world is not to attempt to solve it on the level of its expression—the level of the body or the world—but simply to bring it back to its source, which is in the mind's decision to identify with the ego. That's the cause of every problem.

Thus, when the Course talks about cause and effect, it is talking about the cause as the belief in the reality of that "tiny, mad idea." This belief, the cause, then leads to the effect of the physical world and all the different expressions of the ego thought system in the physical world. So there is no order of difficulty in miracles because all that the miracle does is say the problem is not here in the body or in the world or in what this person is doing to me. The problem is simply that I made the wrong choice. The miracle brings the problem back to where it is in the mind.
. . . . .

To state it simply, as we will see in these sections, the cause of every sickness, of every pain, of every problem, is the belief in separation. Once we define the cause that clearly, it's obvious that the solution is to rejoin the Holy Spirit. If the problem is that I separated from the Holy Spirit in the first place and moved towards the ego, then the solution is simply to undo what I have done. I return my mind to the place where I made the choice. This is the part of my mind that can choose, which is where the power of my mind lies. And then I make another choice. That is why Jesus says his Course is so simple. Every problem arises because we have dropped his hand and moved away from his love and his thought system and have identified with the ego. The solution is simply to pick up his hand again.

In this section we are going to see the idea that I've mentioned briefly already, that it takes two people to make a sickness. That is why, from Jesus' point of view—but not from the world's—no one here is sick. It takes two people to make a sickness, just as it takes two people to make a battle, to wage a war. The ego begins with its belief that it is at war against God. But that belief is totally within its own system; God doesn't even know about it. The Holy Spirit is not at war with the ego. It's the ego's version or projection of the Holy Spirit that is at war with the ego. There is no war. The whole thing is totally made up.

Similarly, if the cause of our sickness is our being separate from God, but God doesn't even know that we are separate from Him, then we are not separate from Him. If God knew about the separation, if God indeed called what we had done "sin," then sin would be real, and we would have indeed separated from Him. The whole point of the Course is that, since God doesn't know about the separation, it never happened, and therefore there is nothing to atone for. That is one definition that Jesus gives for the Atonement. He contrasts it with the traditional Christian view, which holds that God does know that we have separated from Him. God does know that we have sinned against Him, and therefore the sin is real. We now have to atone for it, which is where the whole idea that suffering and sacrifice have a value comes from.

In the Course's view, God doesn't know about the separation. Therefore, the whole thing is simply made up. The Atonement then is simply the correction for our mistake—turning away from the Holy Spirit and turning to the ego. So the Atonement, or the correction, is simply to turn back to the Holy Spirit. The miracle then is the means whereby we do that. We will see how this is explained as we review the section.

We can see from our discussion earlier that when I get upset because you are sick, I am as sick as you are. Obviously if I'm upset by your sickness, I'm making your sickness very real. It takes two of us to make a sickness—you to decide you are separate and sick, and me to decide and agree with you. At that point, I am acting just like the ego, because that's what the ego does—it makes the error real, it makes sin, separation, and sickness real.

We are asked instead to think like the Holy Spirit, and to reflect His alternative in the mind. This means I do not make the error real—on a practical level, I do not deny that you are manifesting physical symptoms, but I deny that those physical symptoms have an effect on me. If I feel guilty because of what you have done or are doing, if I feel anxious or depressed or angry about it, then obviously I'm making it real. At that point healing is impossible. Clearly, if I'm making your sickness real, I'm making separation, the body, judgment, and differences all real.

The way out of this problem is to leave the battlefield, as the Course says, to raise myself above the battleground (T-23.IV). I leave the battleground and go back to that place in the mind where Jesus is. That is what the Course calls the holy instant—when I choose to go back into the mind with him, look at all this, and then see it differently. I see that your sickness or distress is your call for help, which mirrors my same call for help.

Let's start looking now at **"The Agreement to Join" (T-28.III).**

**(Paragraph 1 - Sentence 1) What waits in perfect certainty beyond salvation is not our concern.**

The purpose of the Course is not to help us reach Heaven—it is not to teach us what love is. The purpose of the Course is to undo what the ego has done

**(Paragraph 1 - Sentence 2) For you have barely started to allow your first, uncertain steps to be directed up the ladder separation led you down.**

This is Jesus' way of telling us that we are right at the beginning of the journey. We are already well into the text, in Chapter 28, and he is telling us that we are just at the beginning. This is the same idea as we find expressed in the workbook at the very end, where he says, "This Course is a beginning, not an end" (W-pII.ep.1:1).

These sentences and passages that are throughout the books are extremely helpful so we don't get caught in the idea that since we have been working with the Course for three months or three years or three decades (which hasn't quite happened yet), we should be healed already. It does not happen all that quickly. Within the illusion of time where we believe we are, our investment in the ego thought system is immense.

If we stop to consider that the guilt in the mind is what we have made real, that this guilt literally made up this world, and nourishes and sustains it, we begin to have an appreciation of the hold that we have on the ego. We don't want to let it go. We would gladly suffer all the pain and discomfort and hurt that is involved in being in a body, rather than leave it all behind and leap into our Father's Arms. That, to us, is an even worse fate. Statements like this one are helpful to keep us humble.

Jesus is saying that the separation or the ego thought system is like a ladder, and we have gone all the way down to the bottom of the ladder. The bottom rungs of the ladder consist of believing that our experiences in this world are very real—our bodies are very real, our thought system is very real, guilt is real, fear is real. And all of our feelings are justified—guilt, fear, annoyance, etc. This is why the Course is such a powerful tool. It meets each of us where we are at all different levels of the ladder—whether we're right at the bottom or walking with others as they make their ascent. And basically, to ascend the ladder means to recognize more and more what the ego is up to. What enables us to get our feet off the ground and up the first couple rungs is recognizing what the ego thought system is and how identified we are with it. Not that we necessarily have to let it go—that comes later—but we recognize what we are doing. So we can begin to understand, even if it's difficult to put it into practice, what Jesus really means when he says that concern over other people is really attack (M-7.4). Obviously, Jesus does not feel that way. Feeling sorry for my ailing cat, one of the examples we've been working with, does not seem to be a hateful thought. But when we understand it in the context of our discussion—that it makes separation, pain, and differences real—then we can understand how it is also a vicious attack.

So the beginning of the process is simply recognizing what the ego is doing, and beginning to develop a very healthy respect for our fear of God's Love. That fear is so enormous that we would gladly rush to the ego's side every time, embracing its "friends"—guilt, pain, annoyance, depression, sickness, anger, etc.

**(Paragraph 1 - Sentences 3-4) The miracle alone is your concern at present. Here is where we must begin.**

And so the miracle has nothing whatsoever to do with God or truth. The miracle is the undoing of illusion. It brings our attention back from the world and the problems of our bodies to the mind, where the problem is.

We recognize increasingly as we work with this material over time that we cannot do without the Holy Spirit's help. In fact, doing it without His help is what got us into trouble in the first place. What we are asked to do, which is a point I'll come back to over and over, is simply to look at the investment we have in making sickness and judgment real. And we are asked to look at it with Jesus or the Holy Spirit next to us, which means that we look without judgment. When the Course says that we should look, it does not mean looking through the eyes of judgment. That's what the ego does. The idea is to look without judgment, realizing that if I have done something wrong, it's my call for love. If you have done something wrong, it's your call for love. And what we do with calls for love is answer them. We don't hit people over the head—whether it's a call for love from somebody who is sweet and innocent or somebody who is a vicious murderer. We can make no distinctions. A call for love is a call for love, regardless of its form.

**(Paragraph 1 - Sentence 5) And having started, will the way be made serene and simple in the rising up to waking and the ending of the dream.**

"Having started" refers to this process of stepping back and looking at our egos in action, and watching how vicious and murderous they become. And we are just at the bottom level of the ladder. The top of the ladder is the awakening, the attainment of the real world, and the awakening from the dream of death. This is the same image, by the way, that you find in The Song of Prayer pamphlet, where prayer is talked about as a ladder (S-1.II.7:1; 8:3;III.2:1). The top of the ladder is the song of prayer, which is abstract (it does not have a melody or notes), and which the Father sings to the Son and the Son sings to the Father.

**(Paragraph 1 - Sentences 6-8) When you accept a miracle, you do not add your dream of fear to one that is already being dreamed. Without support, the dream will fade away without effects. For it is your support that strengthens it.**

We are getting now to the important part of this whole idea. Being sick or in pain already is an expression of your dream of fear. No one in his right mind, no one aware of the Love of God within him, would ever choose to be sick. Sickness is a call for help. Sickness is how the ego takes the guilt and the conflict in our minds and projects them on to the body, so that the body is now sick. We become preoccupied with the pains of the body, whether it is my body or your body. As long as I am concerned about and focused on my body, I am in the world. My mind is not looking where the guilt really is.

Sickness is my choosing to be separate from the Holy Spirit. I choose to identify with the ego and its guilt and sin. Then I place that thought system outside my mind, onto the body. Now I say, "It's not my mind that is sick; in fact, I don't even have a mind. It's my body that is sick, and I am the innocent victim of something from the outside that has come in and invaded me. That's what sickness is." Sickness, like everything else, is an attempt to deny responsibility for having separated ourselves from the Love of God.

But the ego does not stop at just taking the guilt from my mind and projecting it onto my body. It takes it one step further and says, "The reason I am sick is you." So in sickness the ego gets us twice. It projects the guilt onto my body, so I am sick and in pain, and then it compounds the guilt by projecting responsibility for my sickness onto you. As the Course explains elsewhere, whenever we choose to suffer pain or to be sick, we are really saying to someone—whether that person is physically present, has died, or is just not in our immediate vicinity—"Behold me, brother, at your hand I die" (T-27.I.4:6). Getting sick is my way of saying to you, "You should feel guilty because of what you've done." If I can get you to feel guilty—at least this is what I believe about you—whether you feel guilty or not, then I'm not guilty. The sin then rests on you and not on me. Sickness, therefore, is a crazy—but everything of the ego is crazy—way to escape from the burden of our guilt by punishing our bodies, and then making somebody else responsible for it. Sickness is a way of avoiding our fear of looking within. In back of the fear of looking within is the image of a wrathful, vengeful God Who would destroy us.

Sickness can also be understood in relation to another of the ego's dictums: that God is going to punish us. Of course, if God is going to punish us, it means we will be destroyed. So the ego basically has us tell God back: "Don't you punish me. I will take care of it myself. Yes, I stole from You and, yes, I stole Your creative power and, yes, I hid it in my body—but look what I'm doing to my body! I'm punishing it. I'm wracked with pain and suffering—all so You don't have to punish me." Sickness, in this context therefore, is a crazy, insane way of mitigating the wrath of God. Everything about sickness is a reflection of fear—fear of God's wrath and fear of looking at our own guilt. It is an attempt to avoid the inevitable by projecting the guilt outside ourselves and blaming somebody else for it.

When you are sick, I know that you have already done the same thing, because sickness is a witness to that. When I get upset because of your sickness, I am making the same mistake you are, except I'm just changing the form. Instead of seeing myself as sick, I am now seeing you as sick. By seeing you as sick, once again I am seeing separation, difference, judgment, and attack all as real. I'm seeing you and me as different, and I'm seeing sin as real, because whenever I make the body's sickness real I am saying that someone is being punished; and I say this because we all have interpreted anything that goes wrong with the body as an expression of God's punishment.

That is why the Adam and Eve story is such a powerful myth—it is an expression of the ego. When God catches up with them, He punishes them. We experience all suffering and pain, including our death, as God's punishment. The psychological principle involved in this is that guilt always demands punishment. If I feel guilty over my sin against God and my separation from Him, I deserve to be punished. Even though I may have totally repressed God's wrath in my mind so that I am not conscious of it, there's a part of me that still believes that anything that happens to me is God's doing. He's getting even with me. If I make your sickness real, I am making the punishment from God real as well, and I am reinforcing your dream of fear. My mind is telling your mind: Yes, indeed, we are correct in being fearful, guilty, and sinful, and feeling that there is nothing we can do to stave off the inevitable wrath and punishment of God. At that point, I am as sick as you are. We form an alliance against the Love of God because we have both witnessed to the wrath of God by making sickness and pain real.

This, again, is the ego's false empathy, the false joining where I join with you in suffering. I join with you by telling you that the thought system of the ego is absolutely correct. If I don't agree with you and don't support your dream—we are talking about a thought in the mind, not what we do on a behavioral level—if I don't allow myself to be anxious and guilty and angry because you're sick, if I'm clear that the Love and the peace of God within me is totally safe, independent of what your ego may do, then I'm giving you a clear message that there is another way of looking at this. There is another thought system present in the mind. There is something else besides the guilt, fear, attack, separation, sickness, and pain of the ego. And that is the Love of God. By my being loving and peaceful and not buying into your dream, I am giving you that message. That is what is meant by "without support, the dream will fade away without effects. For it is your support that strengthens it." I am not responsible for your thought system. I am only responsible for mine. But if I am as afraid as you are, then I am telling you your thought system is correct.

**Part X
Commentary on the Section "The Agreement to Join" (T-28.III)**

**(Paragraph 2 - Sentences 1-2) No mind is sick until another mind agrees that they are separate. And thus it is their joint decision to be sick.**

Obviously, this has no meaning to anyone who believes that this world is real. This only has meaning when we can step back and rise above the battleground, above the world of the body, and look down from that point in the mind where the love and the truth of Jesus stand with us. We then can realize that sickness has nothing at all to do with the body. Sickness is the decision to be separate. As I have been saying, these lines help us understand and appreciate just how radical this thought system is. All sickness—in fact, everything of the body—is of the mind, because there is nothing in the body.

The temptation always is to join with the person's sickness—we try to make the sickness or the physical pain or the psychological pain go away. This is as insane as sitting in a movie theater watching a movie, when all of a sudden something goes wrong with the film, so that what is on the screen begins going up and down, and everybody runs up to the screen to try to fix the problem on the screen. There is no problem on the screen. There is nothing on the screen. The problem is in the projector or the film. That is where to go to fix what is wrong with what we are seeing outside ourselves. Well, when we run to help each other by trying to fix a physical problem, it is just as insane. Whether it is a problem of the body, or of an emotional response, or of something external, what we are doing is just as insane as rushing up to a movie screen and trying to fix what is wrong.

All we are seeing on the screen is a projection of what is wrong in the film projector or the film. Similarly, what we are seeing in someone's sick body is an out picturing or a projection of what's wrong with the film of guilt that is running through the mind. Basically we are seeing a wrong decision to identify with the ego instead of the Holy Spirit. And yet we continually rush up to the screen to try to soothe and comfort each other and to fix the problem here. We want to put a band-aid on the screen, or on the body, rather than to go back to the source of the problem in the mind.

**(Paragraph 2 - Sentence 3) If you withhold agreement and accept the part you play in making sickness real, the other mind cannot project its guilt without your aid in letting it perceive itself as separate and apart from you.**

The part we play in making sickness real is in turning to the ego instead of to the Holy Spirit. At the moment we drop the hand of Jesus and join with the ego, we become sick. It must be one or the other—if we drop his hand we take the ego's; if we drop the ego's hand we take his. At the moment we drop his hand, we are sick. Our bodies may not reflect that choice immediately—we are all very good at denying all the distress that comes from our belief that we are separate from God's Love. The sickness is our believing we are alone and that we can handle things our way.

This does not mean that, from your point of view, you cannot still project guilt onto me. But if I don't take it seriously, if I don't let it affect me or rob me of the Love and peace of God, the projection goes absolutely nowhere. Basically this is what Jesus did for us in the world. Others projected wildly onto him but since he did not take it personally, he did not make their seeming attacks real. He did not let what they did affect his reality and his remembrance of who he was as a child of God. It had no effect.

That basically is the Course's way of describing how forgiveness works—we show each other that the seeming cause has had no effect. When you attack me and I get angry or feel hurt, I am saying to you, "Your sin against me is the cause of my being so upset. And by seeing how upset I am, by seeing how hurt you have made me feel, you should feel guilty about what you have done." In other words, once again, "Behold me brother, at your hand I die" (T-27.I.4:6).

My death—whether it is an actual physical death or the "little death" the Course refers to as sickness (T-27.I.4:8), or even just being mildly upset—is my way of saying to you, "Look at the miserable effects of what you have done. You should feel guilty accordingly."

We are asked to demonstrate to each other that our seeming sins against each other have had no effect at all. No matter what you have done, my love for you is unchanged. No matter what you have done or failed to do, the peace of God within me is still present. You have not taken it away.

At that point then, no matter what you have done—whether you have consciously tried to attack me or not—I show you it has had no effect. This means your projection goes nowhere and I am not reinforcing your thought system. To the contrary—I am showing you that there is another thought system in the mind. By choosing that thought system for myself, I am reinforcing the part of your mind that can make the same choice. Again, Jesus did that for all of us, and he asks us simply to manifest that choice as much as we can, to and for each other.
. . . . . . .

**(Paragraph 2 - Sentences 4-6) Thus is the body not perceived as sick by both your minds from separate points of view. Uniting with a brother's mind prevents the cause of sickness and perceived effects. Healing is the effect of minds that join, as sickness comes from minds that separate.**

This basically is talking about what goes on within the individual mind. The cause of sickness is the perception, or the belief, in being separate. Once we define that as the cause of sickness, then healing—the undoing of sickness—must be joining. If we begin by understanding that sickness comes from separating from the Love of God, then healing comes from joining with the Love of God.

Invariably, when I separate from the Love of God, drop the hand of Jesus, and say he is getting too close, I project the responsibility for that on to you. So I do not experience myself as separate from God, I experience you as having taken that Love of God from me. Now I am not only separate from God, I am also separate from you because of what you have done. That is where my attention is, so that is where I have to begin. Forgiveness says that what I thought you did to me you did not do to me. I am sick because of a decision I made, not because of something you have done. In my mind, I accept that you and I are brothers or sisters in Christ, that we are not separate. By letting you off the hook—I recognize that you are not the cause of my distress, I am—I am saying that you and I are no longer separate. Having undone the separation I placed between you and me, what remains is the oneness and the joining that was already there.

Remember, we do not join in an active way, because we are already joined. We remove the belief in separation that keeps that joining separate from our awareness. By saying you are not responsible, I am joining with you. What allows me to do that is that in another part of my mind I have rejoined Jesus or the Holy Spirit—I cannot join with you or forgive you without first joining with them.

Again, the cause of sickness is separating from the Holy Spirit, which gets expressed in my separating from you. The effect of that is my being sick. When the cause is removed by joining, the effect is what we call healing. Most of the time the Course speaks of healing as an effect, which means that I feel different. But the true healing is not of the body; the true healing is of the mind that has been separate.

**(Paragraph 3 - Sentence 1) The miracle does nothing just because the minds are joined, and cannot separate.**

This states clearly that the miracle literally does not do anything because we are already one. We do not have to join with each other. We do not have to join with other groups of people. We do not have to join with the planet. We do not have to do any of these things, because we are already joined. We simply accept the joining that is there. What allows us to accept that is rejoining ourselves with the Love of God. When we identify with that Love within, we automatically remember that we are joined with everyone else. So the miracle simply undoes the block that kept our true joining hidden from us.

**(Paragraph 3 - Sentence 2) Yet in the dreaming has this been reversed, and separate minds are seen as bodies, which are separated and which cannot join.**

In other words, all of this is a dream. And, of course, the ego has turned everything around. We begin by separating ourselves from God and the Holy Spirit, and we then take those thoughts of separation, project them onto a world, made up to be separate, and we experience everybody else as separate from us. The separate thoughts in the mind, which began with the thought of being separate from God, become "embodied" in a body, and all bodies appear to be separate

**(Paragraph 3 - Sentence 3) Do not allow your brother to be sick, for if he is have you abandoned him to his own dream by sharing it with him.**

This does not mean I physically stop you from being sick. It is saying, instead, that I should not allow you to be sick in my mind by making your error real. If you believe that you are sick, and I react to you as if you are sick, which means that in my mind I allow your sickness to disrupt my state of peace, then I become as sick as you are. I am telling you that you are right.

**(Paragraph 3 - Sentence 4) He has not seen the cause of sickness where it is, and you have overlooked the gap between you, where the sickness has been bred.**

The first part of the sentence states that if you believe you are sick, it is because you have forgotten that the cause of sickness is in your mind. You believe you are sick because of a germ or something that has occurred within your body, forgetting where the sickness really is. The sickness lies in the gap.

The second part talks about the gap, which is an important phrase in this part of the text. The little gap is the gap we perceive between ourselves and God. This little gap is the cause of sickness, because we have made the gap real. We have said there really is a gap; there really is a separation between me and God. That gets expressed secondarily then as a gap between me and the Holy Spirit.

So I first had the "tiny, mad idea" of being separate from God. Then I separated myself from the Holy Spirit's Voice which is the memory of God's Love, saying: "No, that's not what it sounds like. It's not a memory of love; it's really a memory of hate and wrath, and I should be separate from it." It is the perception of a gap that I have made real. So when I project that thought onto a world, I make up a world filled with gaps, such as the gap between your body and my body. That is what bodies do, they separate, and so there are gaps everywhere. The entire cosmos is made up of gaps—the empty space between stars and planets; the gaps made by land and water on planet earth; and most important, the gaps between ourselves. So sickness and bodies maintain our perception that the gap is real.

When I identify with your sickness, I am overlooking the gap in my mind, and instead seeing it in the world. I am saying there is a gap between your body and my body. But the gap is not there at all. The gap is not between bodies because there are no bodies. The gap is in my mind. Yet rather than look at the gap in my mind, I see it between us, which, again, is exactly what the ego wants me to see. The ego does not want me to perceive the separation between myself and God as the problem. It wants me to perceive the problem within my body.

The sickness has not been bred in the body. The sickness is not the cancer or the AIDS virus that is eating away at my body. The sickness is bred in the little gap in my mind. But the ego wants me to get as far away from that gap as possible. If I go back to where the gap is, I will also hear the Voice of the Holy Spirit and realize, finally, that this Voice is my friend, not the enemy. The ego's purpose is to get us as far away from the mind as possible.

**(Paragraph 3 - Sentence 5) Thus are you joined in sickness, to preserve the little gap unhealed, where sickness is kept carefully protected, cherished, and upheld by firm belief, lest God should come to bridge the little gap that leads to Him.**

This one sentence succinctly expresses the whole thought system of the ego with its purpose of keeping God away. The little gap between ourselves and God that we perceive as so real has already been undone and bridged by the Holy Spirit, the memory of God's Love. If we identify with that Love, we remember it and then the little gap is gone. The ego wants to keep the undoing as far away from us as possible. That is why it invents this whole story, telling us God is angry and wrathful, and we do not want to be anywhere near Him.

To repeat, sickness helps us keep the little gap unhealed, because sickness keeps our attention on the body and away from the mind where the gap is. The gap is perceived between two separate bodies, or within my own body when my body does not work right. The purpose of sickness, like anger or anything else in the world, is to distract us from where the problem really is. We choose it because we do not want God to come.

**(Paragraph 3 - Sentence 6) Fight not His coming with illusions, for it is His coming that you want above all things that seem to glisten in the dream.**

Jesus is saying, "Stop trying to defend the thought that you are right. Stop trying to convince yourself that I am wrong and you are right. Just listen to what I am telling you—everything you do in this world is an illusion, designed to keep the Love of God away from you. And yet you want the Love of God more than anything in the world. Nothing that glitters or glistens in this world, nothing that attracts you here is worth throwing away the Love of God." The more we can understand that, when we are angry or sick, or when we empathize with people who are sick, we are making a decision to keep God's Love away from us, the less we will do it.

In other words, the whole purpose of the Course is to restore to us the idea that we do have a choice between miracles and murder, as the text says (T-23.IV.5:5-6). We have a clear choice between being miserable and being happy, between being with God in love or being outside Heaven in pain. The problem is we do not know we have a choice. The only choice we believe we have is to kill or be killed (M-17.7:11). The ego allows us to experience only one choice—Do I get killed first or do you get killed first? This ends up, of course, not being much of a choice, because even if I win now, at some point my body is going to die, and God will have the last word. That is the only choice that we believe we have.

The only purpose of the miracle is to restore to us the awareness that we have another choice. It does not matter what my problem is—I may be sick, annoyed, angry, or I may feel myself becoming critical, I may be depressed, or I may be making your problems real, which I would only do because I want to make my problems real. But if I can be clear that I am using my problem to keep the love of Jesus away, then I won't do it anymore. The Course places a strong emphasis, as part of its whole process, on developing a personal relationship with Jesus or the Holy Spirit. I want to be able to say to Jesus, without judging myself or judging somebody else, "You've gotten too close. I have to push you away. And the way I push you away is to get sick, to get angry, to get depressed, to make stupid mistakes, to get people angry at me, to fall on my face, etc. I've done this because you were too close, and I was too afraid of being happy." That is what undoes the seeds of sickness, because the sickness is festering right here in my choice to separate from Jesus and to choose the ego instead. Sickness has nothing to do with the world or the body. It has nothing to do with your body or my body.

**Part XI
Commentary on the Section "The Agreement to Join" (T-28.III) (cont.)**

**(Paragraph 4 - Sentences 1-2) The end of dreaming is the end of fear, and love was never in the world of dreams. The gap is little.**

This is another clear statement that love is not present in this world of dreams. The reflection of love is present in the world of dreams, but not love itself, because the dream was made to exclude love. The world was made to keep God out; the body was made as a limitation on love. Once you limit love, it stops being what it is.

If "the end of dreaming" is the end of fear, we could say the beginning of dreaming is the beginning of fear. Basically fear comes from the ego's dream, which is that we have separated from God. In reality, however, "the gap is little." In fact, at another level we can say that the gap is nonexistent, that this little gap is absolutely nothing. That is what the Course calls "the tiny tick of time." That is all it is—a tiny dip from eternity that had no effect at all.

**(Paragraph 4 - Sentences 2-3) The gap is little. Yet it holds the seeds of pestilence and every form of ill, because it is a wish to keep apart and not to join.**

Even though "the gap is little"—it has been compared to an infinitesimal ripple in the ocean, or a tiny sunbeam in relation to the sun (T-18.VIII.3:3-4)—yet within this little gap is contained the entire world of pain that we experience. This seems impossible to us who believe that we are here. But we believe we are here so that we won't look at what this little gap really is—a tiny insignificant piece of nothing. And yet we have given it the power to destroy Heaven.

That is another example of the arrogance of the ego. We believe this little, itsy bitsy nothing had the power to destroy God, shatter Heaven, and, even more, literally drive God insane so He becomes the image of ourselves. Instead of our being the image of God, He becomes the image of us—a raging maniac who makes sin real and only wants vengeance. So He makes separation, difference, judgment, and attack real. All this is coming from the" tiny, mad idea," the little gap. If we could ever look at it, we would realize that there is nothing there.

When we choose not to look at the gap, we are listening to the ego. The ego counsels us: "Don't look at this little gap, because it is filled with your sin and guilt. It contains within it the raging vengeance of God, before which you should stand in terror." We say to the ego, "Yes, I understand what you are saying. You are right, I will never look at it again. I will get away from it as quickly as I can. I will make up a world, and I will hide there." And we never look. If we did, we would realize that there is nothing there.

So we can also say that our problems consist of not looking at their cause, at their source. If the problem is defined as not looking, then the solution is clear—we look. Not looking at the ego means we have listened to the ego and have turned away from the Holy Spirit. Therefore, looking at the ego means that we are dropping the hand of the ego and are looking with the Holy Spirit, Who tells us, "Look at all this—it is nothing more than a silly dream in which absolutely nothing has happened. And the gap is very, very little. Nothing is there." When we do not look at the gap, we make sin and guilt real. That is the cause of all of our problems and all our pain. The entire world is contained in this little gap.
. . . . . . .

The "wish" referred to in the passage is the wish to keep ourselves apart from God, apart from the memory of God's Love, the Holy Spirit. Because that is the wish that made the world, we then wish to keep ourselves apart from everyone here. We have the illusion of joining with each other, but that is specialness—the joining to have our needs filled. That kind of joining reinforces the ego thought system, and so it is not a real joining at all.

**(Paragraph 4 - Sentence 4) And thus it** [the little gap] **seems to give a cause to sickness which is not its cause.**

Because we make the gap and the ego thought system real and project them out into the world, the cause of sickness is seen to be in the body, external to the mind. The truth, however, is that the cause is retained within this little gap. If we could ever look at the gap with open eyes, we would realize what it is and let it go.

**(Paragraph 4 - Sentences 5-6) The purpose of the gap is all the cause that sickness has. For it** [the gap] **was made to keep you separated, in a body which you see as if it were the cause of pain.**

The purpose of the gap is the wish to keep separate and apart. That is what sickness is—the choice to keep ourselves separate and apart from each other and from God. With this definition of sickness and the body, the definition of healing then is made clear. Within the little gap is the entire ego thought system. The purpose of this thought system is to keep the little gap real—we are separate from God, but we will never look at the gap. That is the key idea—we will never look at it. Instead we look at its seeming effect, forgetting that the world is an effect of the cause. By splitting off the effect from the cause, by allowing this veil of denial to fall across the mind, we forget where everything—the world, the separation, and sickness—came from. Not knowing about the mind, which means we do not know about the gap, all we see is the body.

As this is the only world that we know, we seek for the causes of our problems here. We seek for the cause of sickness here. We seek for the cause of pain here. We do not know anything else, and so there is no place else for us to look. Therefore we continue to look here in the world. That is the purpose of the little gap and of the ego thought system—to protect itself and keep us separate. The ego protects the separation by keeping us separate from the separation. The separation is in the mind—the ego separates us from that. Just as God's Love cannot but extend itself—it is love extending to love extending to love, an ongoing expression and extension of love—so, too, the ego's thought system, based upon separation and fragmentation, can only reproduce itself. So it separates and fragments, and separates and fragments. The ego separates us from God, then separates us from the separation in the mind, by making up a body which is separate. Then we keep looking for separate things outside us to explain why we are feeling as terrible as we are feeling. And it just is endless—it goes on and on and on. The only way out is to realize that the problem is not in the world at all, it is back in the mind. That is what the miracle does. But it seems to us as if the body is the cause of everything rather than the mind.

**(Paragraph 5 - Sentence 1) The cause of pain is separation, not the body, which is only its effect.**

The body is the effect of separation, of a thought in the mind, of a decision the mind made to be separate from God and the Holy Spirit.

What is really important in working with the Course is first to understand the principles being taught; then to be able to apply those principles each time we are tempted to make pain real and to make the cause of pain be something or someone external to the mind; and then just to be aware of how quickly we forget everything.

In effect, the purpose of the workbook is to get the process under way. It is a one-year training program, to train our minds to begin to see that the cause of everything is in the mind. The lessons right at the beginning of the workbook start out that way. These lessons help us realize that the mind makes up everything we see, that our thoughts are important, that the meaning that we have given to everything comes from our past, and that we have the power to change that. So we start to feel upset and our first reaction is to blame it on something we ate or drank last night that we shouldn't have, or on something that somebody said to us. But we can try to stop ourselves as quickly as we can after that happens and remind ourselves that that is not why we are upset. "I am never upset for the reason I think," as the workbook teaches. I am upset because I dropped the hand of Jesus. That is why I am upset. I was feeling alone, and my ego was just looking for something or someone else to blame. I wanted to blame it on the food, or the company I was with, or what this person did or did not do to me—something outside me. So I made the sickness real and then I searched for the cause outside. Then of course what I wanted to do was to get other people to agree with me.

Thus we begin to recognize that that is the false empathy that the ego fosters.

**(Paragraph 5 - Sentences 2-4) Yet separation is but an empty space, enclosing nothing, doing nothing, and as unsubstantial as the empty place between the ripples that a ship has made in passing by. And covered just as fast, as water rushes in to close the gap, and as the waves in joining cover it. Where is the gap between the waves when they have joined, and covered up the space which seemed to keep them separate for a little while?**

This image is of a boat moving through the water, making a gap as it passes by. Just as quickly as the gap is made, waves rush in and cover it over, so that within seconds there no longer is any gap. That basically is the Course's explanation for what happened at the separation. When we seemed to fall asleep and have the "tiny, mad idea" contained in this little gap—that we had separated ourselves from God—simultaneously, the memory of God's Love in our minds that we carried with us into the dream covered over the gap. If we identify with that memory of God's Love, then the gap is gone. The gap is telling me there is a separation between myself and God, but through that memory the gap is closed. The gap was closed in the instant that it seemed to occur. Remember, "not one note in Heaven's song was missed" (T-26.V.5:4). There seemed to be a gap, but as quickly as the gap seemed to be, just as quickly was it undone. As quickly as the tiny tick seemed to happen, just as quickly was it erased. The problem is that we still believe we are here, and we live as if the gap were real and we were indeed separate.

The truth is that the error has already been undone by the presence of the Holy Spirit in the mind. The problem is that we have turned away from Him. Just as we believed we had turned away from God at the beginning, we now believe that we can turn away from the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the Course is to turn us back towards Him. When we turn towards the Holy Spirit and identify with Him, we accept the fact that the dream is already over. That is what the Course means when it says that the script is written and the journey is already over. We only think we are still on the journey. The whole mistake has already been undone. And so, just as the gap in the water when the boat passes by is an empty space that contains nothing, so, too, is this thought. The ego never happened.

**(Paragraph 5 - Sentence 5) Where are the grounds for sickness when the minds have joined to close the little gap between them, where the seeds of sickness seem to grow?**

The original joining is between ourselves and the Holy Spirit, which is reflected by our joining with each other. As we continue to decide not to blame others for our distress, we are beginning the process of accepting our oneness with each other, which is the reflection of our accepting in our minds our oneness with the Holy Spirit.

In principle this happens in one instant. In our experience within the dream, it takes a long time and a lot of hard work and practice. We can see how strong our resistance is simply by recognizing how quickly we attribute our dis-ease, our discomfort, our pain and our annoyance to something other than our own choice. I am upset "because of . . ." But it is never that I am upset because I became afraid of God's Love and separated from it. I became afraid that the Holy Spirit or Jesus were coming too close and I separated from Them. I became afraid of how happy and free from the past I was feeling, and therefore I had to make up a problem.

One way to chart one's progress in the Course—and I mean this half-seriously, because there is always a danger when we try to measure our progress—is to see how quickly we can recall the real cause of our distress. Over a period of time, our reaction time—the time between when we get upset and the time when we remember why we got upset—will grow shorter and shorter. And so we stop blaming someone or something else and say, "I became upset because I became afraid of love."

The danger in this is that, if I judge myself for becoming afraid of love, then once again I will have separated myself from love. If the love of Jesus looks with me on my fear of him, it will be without judgment. And I will simply say, "I became afraid of your love, so I dropped your hand and blamed this person and got angry or sick." If I can do it this way, then I am looking with Jesus. But if I get down on myself because I am so stupid, I forgot, and I am doing it again, etc., then I am right back in the same ego trap.

**Part XII
Commentary on the Section "The Agreement to Join" (T-28.III) (Conclusion)**

**(Paragraph 6 - Sentence 1) God builds the bridge, but only in the space left clean and vacant by the miracle.**

The "bridge that God builds," which the Course defines elsewhere as God's last step (T-7.I), refers to when we are totally awakened from the dream and realize that we never left home. But God can do this only if we first have made this space vacant, which means we have to look at the emptiness of the little gap. The ego fills it up by making it real, filling it with thoughts of sin, guilt, fear, attack, vengeance, defense, sickness, pain, and death, etc. Of course, once the ego has filled it up, it tells us: "Don't ever look here. Let's transfer all the contents, all the thoughts in this little gap, out into the world, and we will deal with it there." The miracle restores us to that place of observation in the mind, where the decision maker is. From here we can turn to the Holy Spirit or to Jesus, look at the little gap and say, "By the way, you were right, there's nothing there. I made the whole thing up." So the miracle returns us to the mind, which is all the Course is trying to teach us to do. That is why it is called A Course in Miracles, not a course in love or a course in Heaven. Our part is to get back to that place in the mind where we can rejoin the Love of God that we believe we separated from. From there we look within at the little gap—what elsewhere the Course refers to as "shrouded vaults" (T-31.V.6:5) or "darkened tombs" (T-28.V.7:5) in our minds. We look within, see nothing is there, and we are finished. And then "God takes the last step Himself" (T-19.IV.3:8).

**(Paragraph 6 - Sentence 2) The seeds of sickness and the shame of guilt He cannot bridge, for He can not destroy the alien will that He created not.**

As long as we misuse the power of our minds to believe that this little gap contains all of our shame and guilt and fear, there is nothing He can do about it. The Course talks about God like this, but in reality, of course, He doesn't do anything. An earlier section that deals specifically with the last step says that God does not take steps. "Taking steps" is only a metaphor. It means that, as long as the mind has chosen to identify with the ego, there is no way the Love of God will be accepted. It is not that the Love of God is not present. We simply have turned our backs on it. And so the love simply waits until we turn back towards it. "The seeds of sickness and the shame of guilt" act according to their original purpose as a defense against the Love of God—like a veil that we put over the light of love that shines in our minds. The light is still there, but a thick shade covers it, and we do not see it.

Many of you probably have heard me tell the story of Helen who was very angry at Jesus one afternoon, and was accusing him of not helping her. She was furious that he had promised that he would help her—her experience was that he had not helped her, and she was feeling very upset. She was going on and on with me about how angry she was at him, and I finally said to her, "Why don't you ask him? Why don't you ask Jesus why he hasn't helped you more?" So she did. The answer that she heard was certainly not what she expected, nor was her response what she expected. Jesus said to her, "I cannot help you more because you are so ashamed of me." And then she just burst into tears.

It is the same idea here. Our shame, which really is just an expression of our guilt, keeps his love away from us. Not that the love is not there, but our guilt keeps his love and his presence away from our awareness. We need a path, or a process that helps us to remove the guilt, which is what the Course furnishes us through forgiveness.

**(Paragraph 6 - Sentence 3) Let its effects be gone** [the effects of our guilt and our fear] **and clutch them not with eager hands, to keep them for yourself.**

That is what we do. Elsewhere the Course explains how we hold on to our guilt. The first obstacle to peace includes the attraction of guilt [T-19.IV-A.i]. The Psychotherapy pamphlet talks about how we hug our guilt (P-2.VI.1:3). Guilt is the ego's most cherished thought, because guilt keeps the thought of separation alive. Guilt comes from sin, and if sin is real it means that we have separated ourselves from God. We clutch our guilt, our sickness, and our pain, because they keep the Love of God away from us. And that is the ego's purpose.

**(Paragraph 6 - Sentence 4) The miracle will brush them all aside, and thus make room for Him Who wills to come and bridge His Son's returning to Himself.**

That, again, is God's last step. The purpose of the Course, the purpose of the miracle, is to prepare for the "coming of God." Basically, the miracle removes all the interferences to the awareness of love's presence within ourselves.

**(Paragraph 7 - Sentence 1) Count, then, the silver miracles and golden dreams of happiness as all the treasures you would keep within the storehouse of the world.**

The miracle and the dreams of happiness are still an illusion. They are still part of the separated mind. But they are the happy dreams that undo the nightmare dreams. When the happy dreams of the miracle and forgiveness replace all the nightmare dreams, then both dreams disappear. And then the little gap is gone. All that is left is the Love of God that was already there.

The Course speaks about forgiveness as a "happy fiction" (C-3.2:1)—the last illusion. It is an illusion because it forgives what never was. The miracle corrects what never happened. Jesus is asking us, within the split mind, to let the silver miracles and the golden dreams of happiness take the place of all of the ego's gifts.

In a wonderful passage in **The Gifts of God** (p. 118), Jesus asks us to give to him all the gifts of fear that the world has held, and, in exchange he will give us his gifts, the gifts of love, which will help us recognize that nothing this world has offered us was ever what we wanted. The passage is as follows:

**The door is open** [here the metaphor is a storehouse, like a room within our mind where all these gifts are],**not to thieves** [a reference to some biblical passages], **but to your starving brothers, who mistook for gold the shining of a pebble, and who stored a heap of snow that shone like silver. They have nothing left behind the open door.**

Our starving brothers are really part of ourselves. And what is really a shining pebble we have mistaken for gold—the ego's gifts are pebbles that are absolutely worthless. But the ego shines them up with such a polish and such a gleam that we yearn for them. And then we get them, and they are worth absolutely nothing. Similarly, in the earlier section on the two pictures (T-17.IV), the Course talks about the ego's picture of death, which the ego takes and puts in a beautifully ornamented frame that seems to glitter with all kinds of jewels, including diamonds and rubies, that seem so important to us. Only when we get close to the ego's gift and look at it for what it is—look at the special relationship for what it is—do we realize that the diamonds are tears and the rubies are drops of blood. And it is not gold shining, but just worthless pieces of stone. But that is exactly what we do. We settle for all the worthless things the world offers us—the pleasures that last for just a short period of time. In exchange we throw away the real pleasure that comes from really knowing the Love of God. What is necessary is not that we know the Love of God, but that we at least recognize what we have chosen in its place, and say, "This is really not what I want anymore."

Our starving brothers are those people, including ourselves, who starve for the Love of God, but who believe that they will never get it. What they stored in the storehouse has been snow that just melts and disappears. It seemed to be so wonderful and pretty, but in reality it disappeared as quickly as they got it. And so nothing is left.

That basically is the lot of everyone in this world. We suffer and struggle; we try to make sense of our lives, but in the end we die. Remember the famous statement, you can't take it with you? All the treasures and the sense of accomplishment and pride are vain attempts to keep ourselves young and attractive and beautiful and handsome. They all disappear, because in the end we are going to die, and there will be nothing left. The whole thing is absolutely futile. But the ego never lets us look at that as we are going along. So the meaning of the passage is that all the gifts that we have amassed are really nothing.

**(Paragraph 7 - Sentences 4-5) What is the world except a little gap perceived to tear eternity apart, and break it into days and months and years? And what are you who live within the world except the picture of the Son of God in broken pieces, each concealed within a separate and uncertain bit of clay?** [That is the body.]

The world is nothing except the projection of this little gap, this tiny, mad idea. The gap was made into a huge cosmos, in which there is a world of separation and of time, a world of days and months and years. The world is nothing more than a projection of that thought. And we who believe that we live in this world are nothing except a Son of God who has been broken up and destroyed. And we believe our identity—what God created—is this broken-up, destroyed piece of clay. Elsewhere the Course refers to the body as a parody (T-24.VII. 1:10) or a travesty (T-24.VII.10:8) of the Self that God created.

**(Paragraph 8 - Sentence 1) Be not afraid, my child, but let your world be gently lit by miracles.**

The first part of this line of course is from the Bible, and it is repeated often in the Bible, as well as in the Course. Jesus is constantly telling us not to be afraid, because the ego's whole thought system is built upon fear. I am afraid of love, I am afraid of God, I am afraid of Who I am as Christ. And so he is telling us not to be afraid. Rather than continually try to heap all the pseudo-treasures in the mind, what we want are the silver miracles.

**(Paragraph 8 - Sentence 2) And where the gap was seen to stand between you and your brother, join him there.**

Where I had seen you as separate from me, making a barrier of your sickness or my sickness, or my sick thoughts of anger, I can now join with you. Joining with you means simply accepting the oneness that is already there.

**(Paragraph 8 - Sentence 3) And so sickness will now be seen without a cause.**

The cause of sickness was my being separate. If I am no longer separate from you and I no longer experience myself as separate from the Holy Spirit, then the cause of sickness is gone. I realize that sickness is an effect whose cause has disappeared, which means the effect must disappear too.

**(Paragraph 8 - Sentences 4-6) The dream of healing in forgiveness lies, and gently shows you that you never sinned. The miracle would leave no proof of guilt to bring you witness to what never was. And in your storehouse it** [the miracle] **will make a place of welcome for your Father and your Self.**

The purpose of the ego's choice of sickness is to give us proof of "what never was," telling us that it does exist. What never was is the little gap or the thought of being separate, which sickness witnesses to. The miracle shows us that all this is simply a silly thought.

The miracle undoes all of the ego garbage that is in the mind, leaving the mind clean. What is left to take its place is the Love of God.

**(Paragraph 8 - Sentences 7-8) The door is open, that all those may come who would no longer starve, and would enjoy the feast of plenty set before them there. And they will meet with your invited Guests the miracle has asked to come to you.**

The "feast of plenty" of course is the feast of miracles, or the experience of the Love of God in this world.

By choosing not to make sickness real, and not to let my inner peace and the Love of God be affected by your choices and your pain, I am reminding myself that the light of Christ shines in me, and therefore I see the light of Christ shining in you. That is why "Guests" is capitalized—it refers to the Christ in each of us, as well as to God. Identifying with and joining with the love of Jesus in my mind enables me to see that same love in everyone. As I am tempted to make your sickness and attack real, whether it is your attack on yourself or on me, I can realize that it is your call for help that mirrors my call for help. So the miracle sets aside all ego thoughts and makes it possible for me to accept who I really am.

**(Paragraph 9 - Sentence 1) This is a feast unlike indeed to those the dreaming of the world has shown.**

"The Attraction of Guilt" sub-section of "The Obstacles to Peace" [T-19.IV-A.i] talks about a feast in a wholly different way. It talks about the angry and hungry wild dogs of fear in our minds that the ego sends out to feast upon all the sin that it can see in the world. That is what the ego in us feasts on: sickness, pain, sin, and judgment. We can't wait to sink our fangs into somebody who has made a mistake. Even if you have not made a mistake, I still believe you made a mistake, because I want to see the sin in you rather than in me.

But there is another feast described in that sub-section: the feast of communion, where Jesus says he is—waiting for us as he has always promised. That feast becomes accessible to us when we let go of our investment in proving that he is wrong and we are right.

**(Paragraph 9 - Sentences 2-3) For here, the more that anyone receives, the more is left for all the rest to share. The Guests have brought unlimited supply with Them.**

In the world, the more you have the less I have. In reality, the more love I can accept in you, the more love there is in me.

Within each of our brothers and sisters is the Christ—the Guest, along with God. By seeing the light of Christ shining in you, I am reminded that the same light of Christ shines in me.

**(Paragraph 9 - Sentence 4) And no one is deprived or can deprive.**

The ego's dream begins with the thought of scarcity—there's something lacking in me—which automatically leads to a thought of deprivation. It is lacking in me because somebody has deprived me of it. Right at the beginning, the only other character on the stage was God. So it was God Who deprived me. I then stole it back from Him and I accused myself of depriving Him—that is what sin is. Another way of understanding the ego's dream is that it is a dream of deprivation. Who is going to deprive whom first? Who is going to kill whom first? That thought then gets transferred down into this world.

**(Paragraph 9 - Sentences 5-6) Here is a feast the Father lays before His Son, and shares it equally with him. And in Their sharing there could be no gap in which abundance falters and grows thin.**

In other words, no one loses here. Despite whatever the body's eyes make real—people being homeless, not having enough to eat, losing their health, etc.—the abundance of Christ still rests within every single person. We are quick to jump on the ego's bandwagon and make sickness, poverty, and deprivation real, because we want to see scarcity as real and outside us. If you are sick, impoverished, and homeless, that proves that God has found out who stole from Him. It wasn't me. It was you. You are in such pain and are having so much trouble because God is punishing you. That basically was the teaching of John Calvin. Calvin taught that you know that you are a member of God's elect if you are prosperous, happy, and healthy. You know that God has damned you and is punishing you because you are not prosperous and instead are poor, miserable, and sick. My investment obviously is to have everybody else suffer so that everything will be fine with me. That is what proves that God has caught the sinner, and it is not me!

I will read that passage again:

**(Paragraph 9 - Sentences 6-8) And in Their sharing there could be no gap in which abundance falters and grows thin. Here can the lean years enter not** [This is taken from the famous biblical account of a dream that Joseph interpreted about the seven lean years: the lean years and the prosperous years that the Pharaoh had], **for time waits not upon this feast, which has no end. For Love has set its table in the space that seemed to keep your Guests apart from you.**

Once we join in the holy instant, time has no effect on us. Once we go back to that place in our minds where Jesus is, and we join with him and no longer feel that we are alone, nothing that the world does can have any effect on us. "It is a joke to think that time can come to circumvent eternity" (T-27.VIII.6:5). It is a joke to think that time or anything within the world of time can have any effect on the love I feel for Jesus and the love he feels for me. If the world of time can have no effect on that love, it can have no effect on the love I feel for everyone else. Within this little gap, Love [the Holy Spirit] has set its table. And the miracle brings the mind back to that gap, reminding us that we can now look within this darkened tomb and not see all the sin and hatred, and the filth and ugliness of the ego. Rather, we can look within and see the Love of God which has always been waiting for us.

**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 workthat 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.

**Part XIV
Commentary on the Section "The Greater Joining" (T-28.IV) (cont.)**

**(Paragraph 2 - Sentence 1) There is a way of finding certainty right here and now.**

Despite all the uncertainty of this world, despite what appears to be the fact that our happiness depends on other people and circumstances beyond our control, it is yet possible to have certainty right here. But the certainty means that we must dislodge our attention from the world and realize that we could be certain and at peace all the time if we chose to be. That is our choice and our responsibility. Nobody can ever take that from us.

**(Paragraph 2 - Sentences 1-2) There is a way of finding certainty right here and now.** [And this is the way:] **Refuse to be a part of fearful dreams whatever form they take, for you will lose identity in them.**

What is important here is not that we do this perfectly, because clearly this is not something we are going to do perfectly right away. But we want to be aware at least, that if we find ourselves upset when a loved one is upset or sick or hurt, that our upset is not coming from what is happening to that person. Even if we cannot help feeling what we are feeling, we can at least recognize that we are not upset for the reason we think. We are upset because we became afraid of the fact that our reality is really spirit, that our reality is something that we both share, and nothing that happens on the level of the body can affect that. We are not asked to do this perfectly, but we are asked to recognize at least where the distress is coming from.

**(Paragraph 2 - Sentence 3) You find yourself by not accepting them as causing you, and giving you effects.**

"Them" refers to the fearful dreams in the previous sentence. This is the way that we find who we are and remember our Identity as Christ. In other words, our well-being, our self-identity, our self-worth are not dependent on other people's dreams. What other people do or say about us has no effect on who we are.

What is important about how this is stated is that we find our self by not accepting that other people can affect us. We do not necessarily accept right away who we are, but we at least recognize that we are not the effect of someone elses dream: I am not the effect of what you have chosen or decided. I am the effect of what Ihave chosen and decided. But because I am afraid of accepting responsibility for my fearful dream—that is the reminder of the origin of the dream when I attacked God, and I do not want to look at that at all—I say it is not my fearful dream that has made me unhappy, anxious, depressed, or sick; it is your fearful dream, and I have simply caught it.
. . . . . . .

We remember Who we are as Christ by not giving other people power over us, and by accepting responsibility for ourselves. I am sick, I am unhappy, I fainted in the hospital room, I faint at the sight of blood, not because of the blood, not because of whatever is going on outside me, but because I have chosen to see myself as a body by separating from the one who reminds me that I am spirit.

**(Paragraph 2 - Sentences 4-5) You stand apart from them** [the fearful dreams]**, but not apart from him who dreams them. Thus you separate the dreamer from the dream, and join in one, but let the other go.**

This is extremely important. The idea is that we can separate ourselves from the ego thought system. Remember, the problem right at the beginning was that, when we listened to the voice of the ego and the Voice of the Holy Spirit, we not only chose to hear the ego's voice, we became the ego's voice. We not only chose to believe in the ego's story of sin, guilt, and fear and a separated self, we became that separated self and forgot that there was any other choice. At that point, the dream and the dreamer became the same. The dream of the separation became the self who I am. So not only am I having a dream of separation, but I amthe dream. I have become the dream of separation—a limited, separated, fragmented, sinful, guilty, fearful, dying self. The dream and the dreamer have become one and the same.

The Course is trying to help us—as this passage is now going to explain—to begin to separate the mind from the dream, so the dream and the dreamer are no longer seen as one and the same. I can now choose to step back with the Holy Spirit, look at the dream, and say this is not who I am.

When you are having an evil dream—let us say, for example, that your dream has taken the form of your being really angry and raping and killing people—my ego would have me say that your dream is very real; the dream is who you are. By my making it real, I am expressing that I believe I am that dream too. I cannot get angry at Hitler, to use another example, unless I first believe that I am the Hitler. I may not agree with what Hitler is doing. I may realize that he is not coming from a place of love. But I would not hate him or attack him or try to hurt him in any way, in my thoughts or in my actions, unless I saw in myself what I am seeing in him. I do not want to see it in myself, so I deny it and project it out. By attacking him, I am saying to God that the Hitler is not me—he is right here, he is the one you want. It is not me. In other words, at that point I am identifying with Hitler's dream. I am seeing Hitler as his dream, and I am seeing myself as that dream.

The Course is teaching us to step back and look at the dream with the Love of God next to us. Thus I step back, drop the ego's hand, take the hand of Jesus, and then say to Jesus, "Look at what this dream is. What a silly dream this person believes—that by murdering thirteen million people he will be happy and safe."

We are now talking about the beginning of the process of withdrawing our identification from the ego and going back to the mind. The mind is the dreamer, and I realize the dreamer is not the dream. The dreamer can now make another choice—what the Course elsewhere calls "choosing the happy dreams." I am no longer totally identified with the evil, wicked dreams—either yours or mine. I can step back and see that there is a mind that is not the dream. And you, who are having the evil dream—whether it is a dream on the level of a Hitler, or the evil dream of being sick, does not make any difference—I can see that there is a mind in you that chose that dream but can just as easily make another choice and choose with the Holy Spirit instead of with the ego. And if I am seeing that in you, I am obviously seeing it in myself. That is what these passages are talking about.

So I join with you now, but not on the level of the dream—"Oh, you poor dear, look at the terrible things that have happened to you"—or, on the level of hate—"Oh, you awful person, look what you are doing." I step back and realize that you have a mind that made the wrong choice, just as I have a mind that made the wrong choice. And we can now join on that level—that is the real joining. So I separate out the mind from the dream. I join with you as the dreamer, not as the dream. I do not join with you in your sickness by feeling sorry for you, or feeling guilty about it, or being angry about it. Rather, I join with you on the level of the decision maker who chose the dream of fear and sickness, because you are afraid of love. And I realize I did the same thing, which means we are one on the level of the mind, not on the level of the dream. I get past the form to the underlying content. The content is not evil or wicked. The content is not sin. The content is fear, a fear that we both share. And underneath the fear is the call for the Love of God that we both yearn for.

**(Paragraph 2 - Sentences 6-7) The dream is but illusion in the mind.** [Remember, it is not the mind, it is an illusion in the mind.] **And with the mind you would unite, but never with the dream.**

I do not want to unite with your sickness or your pain. I want to unite with the decision you made to turn away from love towards fear, because that is what I did. By joining with you there—and that is the true joining—I am undoing the fear of being separate. If I can join with you and say we are both in the same miserable ego boat along with everyone else, that joining within the dream becomes the reflection of the joining within Christ. I no longer see you as separate from me. I do not join with you in an alliance of special love or an alliance of hate. Special love seems to be joining, special hate seems not to be, but they are both different forms of the same illusion. Instead, I get beyond that and identify with the choice that you made, which helps me recognize I made the same choice. Then I can look at a Hitler, or any other person whom we put in that category, and say this person has acted out of fear—not out of evil, maliciousness, or sin. So I am no longer making the judgment of attack. I am making a judgment that says this is fear, which comes from a fear of love, which is the same fear that I have.
. . . . . . .

Thus I no longer identify with your dream, with your pain as you are experiencing it. I identify with your decision to be in pain, to dream a dream of pain, fear, or sickness. This then becomes the reflection of true empathy. I am identifying with the strength of your mind that has chosen to be weak, which means the memory is restored to you of a mind that can choose to be strong.

**(Paragraph 2 - Sentences 7-8) And with the mind you would unite, but never with the dream. It is the dream you fear, and not the mind.**

To repeat the central teaching: I want to unite with the decision-making part of your mind, which helps me to identify with the decision-making part of my mind.

I believe I am afraid of what the ego has told me is real: sin, guilt, fear, punishment, sacrifice, suffering, and death. As other sections in the text teach (e.g., T-19.IV), I am really not afraid of pain, guilt, or death; I am attracted to them. By identifying with pain, suffering, and death, I identify with my body, which means that I identify with the thought of separation. So I fear the dream. But the dream is made up, so it ends up that there is nothing to be afraid of.

**(Paragraph 2 - Sentence 9) You see them as the same, because you think that you are but a dream.**

We equate the dream and the mind, the dream and the dreamer, which means we no longer believe that we have a choice. Remember, when we chose the ego, we became the ego, and that is the end of the story as far as our egos are concerned. The only choice open to us at that point is to kill or be killed. Do I kill you first, or do I allow you to kill me? That is the only choice I see. But the real choice is between the ego and the Holy Spirit. And it is my mind that makes that choice. When I remember where the real choice lies, my mind—the dreamer—is no longer identified with the dream.

But when I think that you are your evil dreams, I think that because you are someone who is sick, and who is dying. And the reason I identify you with your dream of a sick body, or a suffering body, or an oppressed or victimized body, is that I think that I am my sick body too. I think I am the sick dream of sin, guilt, and fear, and punishment. And because that is how I see myself, that is how I must see you.

The important statement in the Course that "projection makes perception" (T-21.in.1:1) is illustrative of that. We first look within, and what we make real in ourselves is what we will make real outside ourselves. If I look within and say I am that limited, separated dream, and the dream and the dreamer are one—there is no other choice—then when I look out in the world, I will perceive that in everyone around me.

**(Paragraph 2 - Sentence 10) And what is real, and what is but illusion in yourself you do not know and cannot tell apart.**

What is but illusion is my ego. What is real in myself is the Holy Spirit. He is the reflection of the reality of my Identity as Christ. But I do not know the difference between reality and illusion, because I have screened off what is real, and have instead made illusion the reality. So the reality now is that you are a separated, sick Son of God, just as I am. And then we have to make the best of what is already a terrible situation. I do not look at what is true in you and what is true in me—namely that we are both minds that have decided that we are separate. But once we can identify with the mind or the dreamer instead of the dream, then we are able to change the dream—that is, before we awaken to the reality that we are all part of the one Mind of Christ, we first have to exchange the nightmare dreams for the happy dreams of the Holy Spirit.

**Part XV
Commentary on the Section "The Greater Joining" (T-28.IV) (cont.)**

**(Paragraph 3 - Sentences 1-2) Like you, your brother thinks he is a dream. Share not in his illusion of himself, for your Identity depends on his reality.**

My identity, the way that I identify myself, will depend on how I perceive you. If I see your ego and your limited, separated, sick body as real, that is how I will see myself. Likewise, if I see myself as a limited, separated, sick ego body, that is how I will see you. It is one and the same. What I see outside is what I see inside; what I see inside is what I see outside.

**(Paragraph 3 - Sentence 3) Think, rather, of him as a mind in which illusions still persist, but as a mind which brother is to you.**

This line is very helpful. We are told not to deny the illusions that appear to be real, but to think of our brother as a mind—a dreamer who makes a decision, but yet a dreamer—still believing that illusions are real. So I do not deny that you experience yourself as sick, deprived, and unhappy, or that I experience myself in the same way. But I begin to develop what can be thought of as double vision, where I both see the dream and recognize that I am not that dream. I do not deny what I am feeling. I do not deny that I am hungry, for example, and I do not stop myself from eating. But on some level I am aware that I am feeding a part of myself that is not my Self. If you are physically sick, you still see a doctor or take whatever form of magic will alleviate your pain or your symptoms. And I do not withhold that help from you. But at the same time that I relate to your sick body or my sick body, I am aware that the sickness reflects a decision I have made to keep the Love of God away.

What is really important in all this is to recognize that our limitations, physical or psychological, are decisions that we have made. They are not the reality. We are the dreamer of the dream, and we can make a choice to have another dream. But the worst thing we can do is deny the experience. This is not a course in denial. It is a course in looking at the ego and making another choice about it. I realize that what I thought was independent of me and beyond my control is, in fact, something that came directly from a choice or decision in my mind.

What is also of great importance in all this is to look without judgment at what we have done—without judgment either of ourselves or of another person. Again, I do not identify with your dream, I identify with your mind. And then our joining with each other as separated minds becomes the way we remember that we are all one mind in Heaven.

**(Paragraph 3 - Sentences 4-5) He is not brother made by what he dreams, nor is his body, "hero" of the dream, your brother. It is his reality that is your brother, as is yours to him.**

This is a reference to the end of the preceding chapter, the section called "The Hero of the Dream," the hero being the body. We are not united because of our bodies. We are united because we share the same mind, and we share the same love that is in that mind. And ultimately we share the same Creator Who created us as Christ. But instead of this level of sharing, we all want to unite on the basis of our bodies. Thus, we may feel joined because we have the same religion, or come from the same part of the country, or have the same color skin, or share the same spiritual path. We all are joining on the basis of our bodies. We say we are brothers and sisters because we share the same body. But we are really brothers and sisters because we share the same mind. Whenever we join based upon the body, we are inevitably going to exclude. The "reality that is your brother" is in the mind, not in the body, not in the dreams of fear. The reality is in the mind that chooses either the dreams of fear or the dreams of love. So we identify, not with the ego, but with the part of the mind that can choose either the ego or the Holy Spirit.

**(Paragraph 3 - Sentences 6-7) Your mind and his are joined in brotherhood. His body and his dreams but seem to make a little gap, where yours have joined with his.**

This expresses the same idea we have been stressing: It is not the body but the mind that is joined in brotherhood. And yet we tend to join on the level of the body, the level of the dream. Even those dreams that appear to be dreams of unity end up simply being ones of separation, where one finds the little gap. Typically, we join in dreams of fear or attack that always oppose some other form of dream. So our dreams still involve difference, judgment, and attack. The idea once again is to see in everyone's dream a call for the Love of God, and then to join in that call.

**(Paragraph 4 - Sentence 1) And yet, between your minds there is no gap.**

The gap is perceived when we identify with the ego, which automatically leads to a body. Since the ego is a thought of something separate, the body then mirrors and embodies that separation. The ego is literally a thought of separation, which begins with the thought that I am separate from God, which automatically means that I am separate from the Mind of Christ that I am. Therefore, my ego tells me, Christ has been fragmented, God has been fragmented, and I am now that fragmented self that is separate from the Mind of Christ. That thought just fragments over and over again, and each of us, appearing to be separate from each other, becomes an aspect of that fragmented self. We are all separate from each other. Bodies separate. Ego thoughts separate. But we are joined on the level of the mind. There is a part within each of us that appears to be fragmented but still can choose. That is what unites us all; and there is no gap there.

**(Paragraph 4 - Sentence 2) To join his dreams is thus to meet him not, because his dreams would separate from you.**

This is what we are calling false empathy: I feel sorry for you—something terrible has happened to you. As I mentioned at the beginning, what makes false empathy such a powerful ego tool is that we empathize with something terrible that has happened to somebody. You have gotten sick, or you lost all your money in the stock market, or somebody killed you or somebody in your family, or somebody cheated you, robbed you, stole from your business, etc. I feel sorry for you because things have happened to you beyond your control. That is the false empathy which denies the power of the mind to choose.

The point here is that when I join with your dreams, I am not joining with you on the level of the mind anymore. If I join with you on the level of the mind, I am saying that you have chosen this. That is the beginning of true empathy. When I empathize falsely, I am empathizing with your terrible dream: How unfair this is! I make the dream real. Something has happened to you beyond your control. When I join with the mind or with the dreamer, I am saying this is a dream that you chose, which becomes the reminder that my lot in life is a dream that I have chosen. So we now join on the level of choice, where the power of the mind is.

A crucial theme in all of this is undoing the belief in the reality of victimization. We are not victimized by anyone or anything outside our own power to choose. That is why we are depressed, upset, or sick; that is why we die. There is a line in both the text and the workbook that says: "No one dies without his own consent" (W-pI.152.1:4). Death is a choice. Sickness is a choice. Loss is a choice. Everything is a choice. The whole purpose of the dream is so that we would be able to say "this has happened to me."

Every single dream in the world of the ego is a dream of victimization—every single one. Something happens to me. The dream seems to begin with our birth. Our experience, and the world's experience, is that birth is not something we choose; birth is something that happens to us. It is not something that an entity chooses—birth is the result of something that two parents do; it has nothing to do with the infant. The birth of the body is the beginning of every dream. Since the birth of the body is seen as something that happens to me—I do not choose it—then everything that happens after that in the dream is an aspect of the same idea of victimization. Something happens to me, I do not choose it. Every single dream involving the body is one of victimization. When we join in with that, we are saying that things happen to you and me beyond our control; the mind is impotent—in fact, we do not even have a mind. So to join with the mind is to join with the power that chooses. That is, again, the beginning of true empathy.

**(Paragraph 4 - Sentence 3) Therefore release him, merely by your claim on brotherhood, and not on dreams of fear.**

"Merely by your claim on brotherhood" means that our brotherhood lies within the mind, as the previous paragraph said. What keeps us one within the dream is that we are all one in the mind that has chosen to be separate. Recognizing that becomes the way we eventually awaken from the dream and realize we are all one in Christ. That is our true Brotherhood, but within the dream, our brotherhood rests on the fact that we are all one in the dream. We have all made the same mistake. We have fragmented into different dreams, but we are all essentially the same dreamer.

And so I release you merely by remembering for myself—and therefore for you, because minds are joined—that this is all a dream that we have chosen, to defend ourselves against awakening to the reality of love.

**(Paragraph 4 - Sentence 4) Let him acknowledge who he is, by not supporting his illusions by your faith, for if you do, you will have faith in yours.**

This is one of the core themes of the Course—we help each other by not supporting each other's dreams of fear. As I was saying earlier, all minds are one, we are all joined, and, therefore, if my mind is healed, your mind is healed, too. Within the level of time and space, you may not choose to accept this yet. Similarly, Jesus demonstrated to all of us the illusory nature of everything in this world, but within the world of time and space we still have to go through a process of choosing to accept it. So I help you acknowledge who you are by reminding you, simply by my presence, that you have a choice. And I remind you by showing you that your dream has no effect on me. I do not love you any more or any less because of what you do. I am not any more or less peaceful because of what you do, or what your body has become. The minute that I let your dream have an effect on me, I am saying your dream is real. That means I am saying the thought underlying your dream is real, which is a thought of being separate from God. If I reinforce that thought in you, I obviously reinforce it in myself. But by demonstrating that my peace and love are not affected at all by what happens to you, I am saying that I am independent of your dream. So I am helping you realize that you, likewise, are independent of your dream. That helps break the identification we made right at the beginning when we became the ego thought system and forgot that we had a choice.

Again, the over-riding message of the Course is that we have a choice. And it is not a choice between illusions here in the world. It is a choice between illusions, in general, and the truth. That is the whole idea. That is why, as Jesus explains at the beginning, he does not do anything in the world. If Jesus fixed things in the world—if he healed cancer or AIDS, if he beamed light into the Middle East and brought light into the darkness—he would be joining with the dream, and he would be as insane as we are. He does nothing with the dream. That is why, in terms of the lesson he taught us, he did nothing with the dream of his crucifixion. He did not stop it, because he knew he was outside the dream. He was the part of the mind that was totally identified with the Love of Christ. He was the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, what happened to the dream was irrelevant.

Other people's dreams of fear manifested in attack, and turned into dreams of viciousness. As I mentioned another time, the Course says, "Frightened people can be vicious" (T-3.I.4:2). But Jesus did not let other peoples dreams of viciousness, attack, and murder have any effect on him, because he knew who he was. He was not the dream of this body that appeared to be beaten up, abandoned, rejected, betrayed, and crucified. In demonstrating that he was not the dream, he gave the world the message: You are not the dream; you are the dreamer, which means you have a choice. So basically Jesus was telling us from the cross that we have a choice in how we experience and perceive him—either as someone who is being victimized, or someone who is teaching us that there is no victimization. That is how the world was healed. Within the world of dreams, we still have to make that choice. But the message is clearly there in the mind, and that is what we learn and teach over and over again. By not letting your dream have any effect on me, I am saying that I am separate from your dream and my dream, and that you are separate from your dream as well. That opens up the possibility of choice—we can now choose another dream.

**Part XVI
Commentary on the Section "The Greater Joining" (T-28.IV) (cont.)**

**(Paragraph 4 - Sentence 5) With faith in yours** [our brother's faith in our dreams]**, he will not be released, and you are kept in bondage to his dreams.**

This is the false empathy, the joining through specialness that we all engage in, wherein we reinforce each other's dreams and both end up in prison.

**(Paragraph 4 - Sentence 6) And dreams of fear will haunt the little gap, inhabited but by illusions which you have supported in your brother's mind.**

This is the joining that the ego fosters. It is a joining in hatred, not a joining in love. The little gap, which is really nothing and seems to separate us from God, becomes the repository of terror. By making the separation real, we make our guilt and the wrath of God real, and the punishment through death inevitable. The gap will then be haunted by fear, because we have made the dream real. We want not to reinforce the dream in each other, but to point beyond it to the dreamer, the one who has chosen it.

**(Paragraph 5 - Sentence 1) Be certain, if you do your part, he will do his, for he will join you where you stand.**

This does not necessarily mean that our brother will do his part within the same time-frame in which we do our part. Just think of Jesus—he did his part perfectly, but within the illusion of time, very few have done theirs afterwards, despite his example.

If I do my part and return my mind to where it truly is, and do not hide out in the world, and I identify with the decision maker and make another choice to be in the holy instant with Jesus, at that point everyone has done the same thing. From that point outside time, I recognize the illusory nature of the dream and the fact that we are all one, and that the dream is already over. Within the holy instant, there is no more dream. It is already over. We still hold on to an image of it as being there, but the separation has already been undone. So the outcome is as sure as God (T-2.III.3:10).

The eighth characteristic of God's teachers is patience (M-4.VIII). Patience comes from the certainty that the problem is already solved. Therefore, Jesus does not wait with impatience. He is not after us, saying, "Hurry up, hurry up." When we feel impatient with people in our lives—whether we are therapists impatient with our patients, teachers impatient with our students, or we are impatient with our children, family members, friends, colleagues, or whatever, it is always because we have lost faith. We have dropped the hand of Jesus and have taken the hand of the ego, which is always involved with time. We are so terrified of punishment that we magically want the problem over so that God's wrath will not descend upon us. Impatience always comes from an underlying threat of impending doom. When we join with the certainty of God, which is what the love of Jesus or the Holy Spirit represents, then there is no fear that if we do not do it "yesterday" or tomorrow, something terrible will happen. We know nothing terrible will happen because all this is a dream, and nothinghappens in dreams.

So Jesus is saying to us that we should be certain that, if we do our part, our brother will do his and will join us where we stand. Where do we stand? We stand within the mind—no longer in the body, no longer in the dream—we stand outside the dream with the dreamer, the part that chooses, who is ourselves. When I stand with Jesus—which is the only way that I can know that I stand in the mind, because the ego would never let me know I am there—I stand with all my brothers and sisters.

**(Paragraph 5 - Sentence 2) Call not to him to meet you in the gap between you, or you must believe that it is your reality as well as his.**

That is what we always do with each other. We call each other to meet us in the gap, to meet us in the dream, to meet us in the body, to make the illusion real somehow, to join with us in whatever it is that we are involved with, in terms of the body. Not in terms of the mind, but in terms of the body. It is the same idea when people want to join with other students of A Course in Miracles, without realizing that they are really asking people to join them in the little gap, to join them in the dream. You want to join with people on the level of the mind, whether they are students of the Course or not. To believe I can only be happy if I am with Course in Miraclespeople is insane. On all levels, that is insane, because it is an attempt to join in the dream, to join in the form. You want to join with everyone. The joining is at the level of the mind. It has nothing to do with the form.

**(Paragraph 5 - Sentence 3) You cannot do his part** [we cannot choose for someone else—Jesus could not do it for us]**, but this you do when you become a passive figure in his dreams, instead of a dreamer of your own.**

In other words, in reality I cannot do my brother's part, I cannot choose for you. But within the dream, when I identify with your dream, I do your part. Your part within the dream is to separate from God, my part within the dream is to separate from God, and then we do it for each other. We reinforce each other's dreams. In reality we cannot choose for each other, but we can at least point the way and reflect that choice to each other.

**(Paragraph 5 - Sentences 4-5) Identity in dreams is meaningless because the dreamer and the dream are one. Who shares a dream must be the dream he shares, because by sharing is a cause produced.**

Identity in dreams means nothing. In other words, identity with the various forms we take, identity with the body, means nothing. And we always identify ourselves with the body. We identify ourselves by our sex, religion, color, place of origin, families, professions, spiritual paths, etc., and Jesus is saying this is meaningless. The mind is important, not the body. Identifying the dreamer with the dream is meaningless. The dreamer is not the dream, because we can choose something else.

The next line—that a cause is produced by sharing—is important. That is the same idea as sickness being caused by two people agreeing to it. Sickness is an illusion, because the Holy Spirit never joined with us in the illusion. The separation is an illusion, because God never shared in it. We believe the separation is truth and sickness is truth, because we have separated and have joined with other people in that illusion.

From the beginning, God did not recognize what we thought happened, which means it never happened. He did not share in the illusion. It is important to understand that God does not even know about this world, and that Jesus and the Holy Spirit do not do anything with the dream. If They did, They would share it, which would mean that the dream had a cause and would be real. The fact that God did not share in it means that the dream is causeless. Two people agreeing on something makes it real. Since God did not agree on the separation, it never happened. At the beginning, there were only two characters in this play: God and His Son; and the Son believed that he and God were separate. God did not acknowledge the separation, because it never happened. Therefore it was not real. The ego wants God to be upset and to do something about it.

Within the ego dream, there is a joining of illusions. Within the ego dream, the Holy Spirit has been turned from the Love of God and the expression of truth into the wrath of God. Within the dream now there is agreement. The ego is at war with God and, within its dream, God is at war with it. Within the dream, the dream appears to be very real and to have a cause. The cause is that God and the ego, God and the Son, both now agree that something has happened. They disagree on who started it—just as in any war there is always disagreement about who started it—but both parties agree that there is now a state of war. Within the dream there is a definite cause; God and the ego have joined in that and have agreed. Yet the reality is God does not know about it; there is no battleground and, therefore, there is no separation. That is the Atonement principle. Two have not agreed on the separation. But within the dream we agreed, because we made up the other characters in the dream. The dream began with only one character: the separated Son of God, now identified with the ego. The ego then makes up other characters in the dream, so there is an illusion of joining. It makes up a God who is angry, so now the battleground is real, caused by our sin against God and God's wrath against us. Then the dream increases and fragments over and over again, so now it appears as if there are all these fragmented sons around, all of whom agree that there is indeed a world. Within the dream, which now has become reality for us, there is a definite cause, because we have shared the dream with each other. When we leave this dream and go back to the dreamer in the mind and join with the Holy Spirit, we are joining in truth. We are joining with the Atonement principle, which says there is no separation, the dream is causeless, and therefore it does not exist.

That is the basic underlying logic of the Course. When we share in each other's dreams, we are reinforcing the original illusory joining and are saying that reality has been destroyed and illusion is triumphant. At that point there is no way out, because the battleground has been made real. We are asked to dissociate or split off from the battleground gradually, and say this is only a dream.

That is what Jesus taught us. He did not share in the illusions of the world. Within his mind, therefore, by not sharing in them, they ceased to exist—they never existed anyway. He asks us to join him in that holy instant, in that space of love in the mind. At that point there is no sharing of illusions, there is only sharing of truth. At that point we become part of the true Cause and Effect. The joining of God and Christ, which is the true sharing, is the Creator and the created. This is the true Cause and Effect. The ego replicates that, but on its own terms, and the true Cause and Effect then is turned into an illusory effect caused by an illusory thought, which is sin and separation.

Is that reasonably clear? I will say it a few more times before we end.

**(Paragraph 6 - Sentence 1) You share confusion and you are confused...**

This is obvious. We are confused about who we are. This is the fundamental mix-up, or confusion. We think we are who we are not, and Who we truly are we no longer believe in. We are confused about our identity. So it should come as no surprise that we are confused about everything in the world. We may believe that we are confused about different aspects of the world, but there is nothing in this world that makes sense, because the world was made to hide sense. Thus we are confused about why things happen or go on the way they do. All this reflects the original confusion about who we are.

**(Paragraph 6 - Sentence 1) . . . for in the gap no stable self exists.**

Jesus is talking about stability versus instability, or clarity versus confusion. In the little gap there is no stable self, because the purpose of the little gap is to keep the Self of Christ hidden from us. The self that takes the place, the substitute self, is the unstable self of the ego. It is unstable because it is never sure that its maker may decide at any point not to listen to it anymore. The maker of the ego is the mind, and the ego's fear is that at some point the mind may return to its senses and choose the Holy Spirit instead of the ego, at which point the ego is finished. So the ego is always in terror that if the mind ever gets back to itself, the ego is out of business. That is why the ego makes up a world to be the distraction.

**(Paragraph 6 - Sentence 2) What is the same seems different, because what is the same appears to be unlike.**

What is the same is that we are all part of the same Sonship. We are all one in Christ. Yet we appear to be different—that is part of the ego magic. The truth is that we are all one. The illusion is that we are all different. As I mentioned earlier, the ego, in making up the world and human beings, made everybody different. Everyone has a unique set of fingerprints, for example, as a way of proving how different we all are. But the truth is that we are all alike.

**(Paragraph 6 - Sentence 3) His dreams are yours because you let them be.**

In other words, once I have identified with your dreams, your dreams have an effect on me, but only because I have given them that power. I have given you the power to take away my peace and my love. When you say something unkind to me, my feelings are hurt, and I say my feelings are hurt because of what you said. But I am the one who gave you that power.

**(Paragraph 6 - Sentence 4) But if you took your own away [if I took my own dreams away] would he be free of them, and of his own as well.**

You can see in sections like this how the same themes are just repeated over and over again, within a particular section, from section to section, and from chapter to chapter, so you get a real sense of the symphonic nature of the Course.

**(Paragraph 6 - Sentences 5-6) Your dreams are witnesses to his, and his attest the truth of yours. Yet if you see there is no truth in yours, his dreams will go, and he will understand what made the dream.**

Again, it is the same idea. My responsibility with you is not to teach you in a verbal or behavioral way that your dreams are illusory. My responsibility is to teach you through the decision that I make that the dream is not true. Now, in the overall dream it certainly is true. But on a practical level, your dream of pain or sickness, or my dream of sickness and pain are not true in that they do not have the power to take away my peace. I realize that what does have the power to take away my peace is my mind, and not anything else. And that is what that last line means: "and he will understand what made the dream." God did not make the dream. You did not make my dream. I made my dream. What made the dream is the mind. So we always come back to the central place that the mind holds in the Course. And it is not a mind that has anything to do with the world or the body.

**(Paragraph 7 - Sentence 1) The Holy Spirit is in both your minds** [The Holy Spirit is in my mind and he is in your mind, too. This was originally written for Helen and Bill—that is why it is written that way.]**, and He is One because there is no gap that separates His Oneness from Itself.**

This makes no sense to us here. A passage earlier in the text says that because we believe we are separate from Heaven, Heaven will appear to us as separate from us (T-25.I.5:1). So the Course talks about God the Father as outside us. We address Him, we pray to Him. The Course talks about the Holy Spirit as Someone Whom we talk to. In reality all of this is One. God and Christ, Father and Son are both totally One. Every aspect of the Christ is totally One. Since that makes no sense to us here, Heaven is talked about, as it explains in that passage, as if it were separate. To talk about the Holy Spirit as totally One within Himself and one within us does not make any sense to us.

We can understand that we all share the same purpose, we are all one in purpose. In fact, the very end of the text talks about how we are all "one in purpose, and the end of hell is near" (T-31.VIII.10:8). That we can understand. We cannot understand how we are all one in our true nature, but we can understand that we are all seemingly separate in this world and share the same purpose of getting home.

**(Paragraph 7 - Sentence 2) The gap between your bodies matters not, for what is joined in Him is always one.**

Our experience in this world does not make any difference. We are not asked to deny our experience of difference here, but we are asked to make that difference unimportant. In other words, the difference between us has no effect on the reality of my love and my peace.

Regardless of the fact that your dream seems to be different from mine, or that we have the illusion of joining in dreams, our minds are totally unified. Again, that makes absolutely no sense to us here, because our experience is so separated. I am here and you are out there. Everybody is separate from everybody else. We have the illusion of one body talking across time and space to another body, which listens to it and reacts to it. We have the experience of reading the Course in a dimension of time and space. We believe this book has a message for us that comes from Jesus, who is not in the book, and we are here. We are not in the book, and we get the message. But it is all experienced across time and space with bodies. The reality is not like that. Rather, it is mind talking to itself.

**(Paragraph 7 - Sentences 3-5) No one is sick if someone else accepts his union with him. His desire to be a sick and separated mind can not remain without a witness or a cause. And both are gone if someone wills to be united with him.**

This, too, makes no sense if we think of sickness as being of the body. You say you are sick and you are in pain, and it makes no difference to you whether my mind is healed or not—you are still sick. But it does make sense when we redefine sickness as having nothing to do with the body, and having to do only with the thought in the mind. Sickness, then, is a decision to be separate.

Remember, it takes two to be separate, to make a sickness, to make up a world. Within the dream, we literally make up the other person. Again, that is how all of this began. There was only ourselves and God, and God did not know about this. So we made up a god to substitute for the true God, and that god did know about the separation. Once there was a god who knew about it, we had conflict—between the sinner and the sinned against. From that conflict, the ego thought system was born, and from that birth, the world was born. Then in this dream, in this world, all these other fragments have joined in the illusion with each other. But the cause of the world, the ego, and sickness is two people joining in the belief in being separate. It takes two of us to be separate. If I change my mind, the whole thing falls apart.

That is what we live out on a microcosmic level with each other. When I am in a relationship with you, and your dream calls for you to be angry at me, and to accuse me of something—whether I have done the deed or not—if I do not take it personally, the anger does not go anywhere. If I do not fight back and am defenseless, nothing happens. When I do fight back, and my anger meets your anger, we both end up becoming defensive. We lock horns, and the conflict solidifies and seems very real.

Reflecting on these ideas once again in the context of physical illness, we can distinguish two different aspects: the disease itself and the choice of the person to identify with the disease—the person's reaction to it, or interpretation of it. This can be a helpful distinction. It is the same as saying that, once I am sick, it does not matter where the sickness came from. I just deal with the fact that I am sick, and that this is reality for me now. I realize that I have chosen to be sick, and I now can choose which teacher will instruct me: the ego or the Holy Spirit.

That is what underlies a most important teaching in the manual. In talking about the body, the manual says: "Do not despair, then, because of limitations. It is your function to escape from them, but not to be without them" (M-26.4:1-2). This is such a helpful and important line. It is helpful because, when we understand it, it is very gentle. Our function is not to be without the limitations of the body. Our function is to escape from the interpretation of the limitations that the ego has made.

If we translate that to sickness, my function is not to be without sickness; my function, when I choose to become sick, is to see my sickness as a classroom in which I can learn my lessons with the Holy Spirit, instead of seeing it as a prison from which I have to escape by dragging you in and blaming you for it. My function is not to be without guilt, sickness, or anger. My function, rather, is not to take any of them as seriously as I used to, and not to be burdened by the interpretation of judgment.

To state it another way: My function is not to be without sickness, but to escape from the belief that sickness has power over the peace of God within me. I want to escape from the idea that the limitations of my body have any power over the love of the Son of God that I am.

Our job is not to share in someone else's dream. When we can do this, we are then living out on a microcosmic level the macrocosmic principle that God never shared in our thought system at the beginning, and therefore our thought system does not exist. We are not asked to do this on that macroscosmic level. We are asked simply to reflect that same principle by not sharing in the illusion of someone else's dream—by not making it real and having a reaction that takes away from the steady, calm peace and Love of God inside us. When I begin to feel myself losing that peace and becoming agitated, angry, worried, concerned, guilty, depressed, or whatever, I can realize that I have bought into your dream and have made my dream real, but there is another choice I can make. I bought into this dream, because I was afraid of love; but now at least I know what the problem is. The cause of my distress is not your sickness or your seeming attack on me. The cause of my distress is that I became afraid of being happy and peaceful; I became afraid of the closeness of the Love of God that I was experiencing within. That is the cause of my distress.

**Part XVII
Commentary on the Section "The Greater Joining" (T-28.IV) (cont.)**

**(Paragraph 7 - Sentences 6-7) He has dreams that he was separated from his brother who, by sharing not his dream, has left the space between them vacant. And the Father comes to join His Son the Holy Spirit joined.**

In these two lines we are getting, in a sense, the undoing of the whole drama of the ego: You and I have entered into a special love bargain or a special hate bargain, in which we reinforce each other's dreams of lack, deprivation, attack, cannibalism, pain, suffering, etc. This means that we both have filled this little gap, this tiny, mad idea, with the seriousness of what has happened. We are saying that the separation thought has had terrible effects, and each of us is responsible for the other's pain. When one of us steps aside from that bargain and decides not to see it that way any longer—not just a verbalization, but something that is believed and begun to be experienced—then the battlefield is gone, because it takes two to have a battlefield. At that point, that person can laugh at the seeming seriousness of the thought that the tiny, mad idea had an effect. If I am that person, I am now able to say that whatever is going on in your dream has had no effect on me. I love you just as much now as I did before you seemed to attack me. It has no effect on me. I am now reminding you of the same choice, and that wipes the gap clean. By laughing—not a mocking or an attacking laugh—at the tiny, mad idea and the belief that this thought could have an effect on me as Christ, the gap is wiped clean. And so now we join with the Holy Spirit, with the Son of God, the whole world vanishes, and God reaches down and lifts us back unto Himself. That is what that last line means: "And the Father comes to join His Son the Holy Spirit joined."

We first join with the Holy Spirit and with the Son of God, which includes you. The Son of God is not just me. It includes everyone, especially you who are my special love partner. When we join together, we rejoin the Holy Spirit and the whole thought system of the ego disappears back into its own nothingness. Everything is gone and we awaken from the dream. The Course's symbol for awakening from the dream, again, is God reaching down and lifting us back unto Himself. That is God's last step (T-11.VIII.15:5).

**(Paragraph 8 - Sentence 1) The Holy Spirit's function is to take the broken picture of the Son of God and put the pieces into place again.**

This does not mean that He is a puzzle maker, or that He sits with all the pieces and puts them together—it is not something that He does. This is an image. His very Presence in the mind, His Love, represents the Oneness of Christ and the unity with God—and that Oneness unites all the seeming fragments.

Right at the beginning, we were like one huge pane of glass which seemed to shatter. But before it shattered, the memory of God's Love was already within it. When the fragmentation occurred, the whole thing shattered into billions and billions and billions of fragments—the entire physical universe. The memory of that Love of God is still within each fragment, and that memory is totally unified. Despite the seeming fragmentation of the dream in which we are all separate, the reality is that we are all one. From the point of view of the fragmented pane of glass, we appear to be very different. But from the point of view of the mind which is totally one, that is, from the Holy Spirit's perspective, we are all one, simply having a silly dream.

Jesus gave Helen an image (it is not in the book, but it was an image to help her understand time) of eternity as a solid unbroken line, with time a downward spiral coming off it. The spiral represents the illusion of time and the world. From any point on the spiral it appears as if the line is broken. From the point of view of the line, nothing has happened. The line, which represents the unity of God and Christ—the unity of Heaven—is totally unbroken. But from the spiral, which is where we believe we are, the line appears to be broken, and at each different point on the spiral everything looks different. So we all have different experiences of each other, God, and Heaven on the spiral. The truth is, of course, that the spiral never happened.

Jesus told Helen that the purpose of the Holy Spirit is to straighten out the spiral, so that it becomes one solid line. Everything then becomes the same, and we realize that we are all the same. From the point of view of the fragmentation—any part on the spiral—we all appear to be different, and the thought that we could be totally unified, as I mentioned before, is absolutely impossible to comprehend. But we can comprehend that we share the same purpose. The idea that we are all one makes no sense to us. But to the Holy Spirit, Who is that Thought of Oneness, this is the only idea that makes sense, because nothing else has happened. This is how the Holy Spirit unites the whole Sonship. Again, He does not literally put the pieces back, because the pieces were never fragmented in the first place. It is the memory of perfect Love in the mind of each of us that unites us and heals the seemingly broken pieces, the broken picture

**(Paragraph 8 - Sentence 2) This holy picture, healed entirely, does He hold out to every separate piece that thinks it is a picture in itself.**

Each of us believes that we are a separate part, a whole unto ourselves. Our lives seem to have a beginning, a middle, and an end. We have a body that demarcates our position vis-a-vis someone else. We have a personality and a thought process that is only within ourselves. We have private thoughts that do not have to be shared with anyone else. We believe we are a picture and a universe entire unto itself. The reality is that we are simply an aspect of the one picture that has never been broken. Earlier, the text talks about the whole as being greater than the sum of its parts. The unified picture of Christ is more than just the sum total of all the fragments (T-2.VII.6:3), because Christ is the total unity, and that unity transcends the individual fragments even if they are all added up.

**(Paragraph 8 - Sentence 3) To each He offers his Identity, which the whole picture represents, instead of just a little, broken bit that he insisted was himself.**

To each seemingly separate piece, the Holy Spirit offers the total identity. In other words, each time I am tempted to see you as separate from me, the Holy Spirit's presence in my mind is the reminder that you and I are both one. And in not seeing you as separate, as sharing a separate dream, as having a separate identity, or as sharing a different purpose from me, I am beginning the process of recognizing we are one. In that process of recognizing we are one, I will come to the recognition that we are one in Christ, and that we share that Identity as one Self. I become aware that I am not this separated person who has an identity separate from your identity, that has a body with a parentage and a personality separate from you. We all share the same need to get back home and the same Identity within that home.

**(Paragraph 8 - Sentence 4) And when he sees this picture he will recognize himself.**

When I can recognize that we are all one, and that you are part of Christ, I will recognize that I am part of Christ, too.

**(Paragraph 8 - Sentence 5) If you share not your brother's evil dream, this is the picture that the miracle will place within the little gap, left clean of all the seeds of sickness and of sin?**

The word "evil" is a very strong word. But this means that even a dream of sickness, a dream of being an innocent victim, is an evil dream, because it is a vicious attack on the unity of Christ, on the unity of the Sonship, and on God. I am saying that I am a body that can suffer. If I am a body that can suffer, I am saying that I have killed off God, and my body now, even if it is dying, is proof that I have defeated God. And I will feel guilty over that. That is where the thought of evil will come in. Jesus is not saying it is evil. He is reflecting back to us our guilt over our belief that we have killed off God, and that is an evil, wicked, sinful thought. He is not judging these dreams as evil. He is reflecting to us the fact that we have judged them as evil.

If we do our part in undoing our belief in the reality of the dream, we are making clear or cleaning up that little gap. Within that gap we would then recognize that, just as we are all one in this world in yearning to get back home, we are all one in God's world as well. That is what the miracle does—it brings us back to the mind. Within that mind, when we stand with the Holy Spirit or Jesus and look at the dream, we realize we are standing with everyone else as well. And the seeds of sickness and sin have been washed away.

**Paragraph 8 - Sentence 6) And here the Father will receive His Son, because His Son was gracious to himself.**

This parallels exactly what was said in the previous paragraph. There is a wonderful section called "Where Sin Has Left" (T-26.IV)—here within the little gap that has now been made clean is the place where sin has left. This place in the mind, to which we have moved back by no longer identifying with the ego's story of sin, is the place where sin has left. That is the real world. The Course explains—but not within the context of time—when we attain the real world we "will barely have time to thank God for it" (T-17.II.4:4) before He reaches down and lifts us back unto Himself. In other words, we pause but for a brief moment and then the whole world ends. This is written, not from our point of view, but from the other side.

Our job is to make clean the place where we had welcomed sin in and had identified with it—now detaching from it, looking on it, and saying: This is the dream that I chose, but I can now choose another dream. These are the happy dreams. And when all the happy dreams have replaced all the nightmare dreams, God comes in.

Being "gracious to himself" means that I learn to be gracious to everyone else. Rather than attacking you and reinforcing your dreams of sin and attack and fear, I become gracious to you, realizing ultimately you are a part of me. And I no longer attack you or myself. From that experience of being gracious, and kind and gentle, all the judgment and attack of the ego is undone. What is left, then, is what was always there—the Love of God.

The next paragraph begins with a prayer from Jesus to God the Father. There are several places like this in the Course where the narrative breaks off and Jesus launches into prayer, which obviously is always on our behalf.

**(Paragraph 9 - Sentence 1) I thank You, Father, knowing You will come to close each little gap that lies between the broken pieces of Your holy Son.**

Clearly Jesus is not praying to God from God's point of view. Obviously, God does not even hear words. This is a literary form through which Jesus is teaching us that the outcome is as certain as God is—and that the broken pieces of God's Son will be healed through our acceptance of the Holy Spirit's presence. Once we do that and let go of all the seeds of sin, guilt, and sickness that are in this little gap—so that the gap is left clean—what is left then is God's last step.

**(Paragraph 9 - Sentence 2) Your holiness, complete and perfect, lies in every one of them.**

This is somewhat reminiscent of the Course's version of the Lord's Prayer, which comes at the end of Chapter 16. The holiness and the perfection of God, the perfection of Christ, is within each of us. This does not mean, as I will elaborate on, that it is within our bodies. It means that the memory of God's Love is still within the mind that has been projected into the body. That memory of God's Love in our mind is what is complete and holy and perfect. And that is the Holy Spirit.

**(Paragraph 9 - Sentence 3) And they are joined because what is in one is in them all.**

All of the seeming fragments are joined—minds are joined—because the presence of the Holy Spirit is in each of us equally. From this side we all seem different. And the idea of the perfect Oneness of Christ seems impossible and inconceivable. But on the other side, from the holy instant, it is not only possible, but it has always been.

**(Paragraph 9 - Sentences 4-7) How holy is the smallest grain of sand, when it is recognized as being part of the completed picture of God's Son! The forms the broken pieces seem to take mean nothing. For the whole is in each one. And every aspect of the Son of God is just the same as every other part.**

This is an important passage that can easily be misunderstood to be an expression of pantheism—namely, that God is in everything in the world: He is in the smallest grain of sand, a chair, a coat hanger, in people, in animals, etc. This is not what it means. It means that the presence of God is total within everyone's mind. Within each of us as a mind is that perfect presence of God's Love—that is the Holy Spirit.

As egos we have walled this part off, and then identified with the opposite of God's Love, which is our hatred of God. We experience ourselves as a guilty and limited self, then take that thought and project it out, so that it now seems to have taken form. I say "seems to have taken form" because in reality there is no form. But there appears to be form here—so there appear to be grains of sand and other minerals and vegetables and animals and all forms of what we call animate and inanimate objects—things that are "alive" and things that are "not alive." All of these are different forms and different ways of trying to disguise the Love of God that is within the mind that has made all of these forms.

God is not in the forms, God is not in the dream. God is in the mind of the dreamer. That is the key idea that will help you avoid getting caught believing either that God is in everything or that the Course is saying God is in everything. There are a number of passages such as this one, and I will mention them in a minute—which seem to say that about God—but that would mean that God is part of the dream. We have seen how we are asked not to be a part of the dream but to be part of the mind. So if Jesus is asking us to do that, obviously God is not involved with the dream either.

In the first of two successive workbook lessons there is the statement, "God is in everything I see" (W-pI.29), and in that same lesson we are asked to say that God is in this coat hanger, God is in this lamp, etc. Then the next lesson states that "God is in everything I see, because God is in my mind" (W-pI.30). Since God is in my mind and I identify with Him, then God is in everything I see. And when the Course says "God is in my mind," it really means that the memory of God—which is the Holy Spirit—is in my mind. In many places, especially in the workbook, the Course uses the word God when it really means the Holy Spirit, the presence of God in the mind. So Lesson 193 says, "All things are lessons God would have me learn," yet God does not teach. The Course is quite clear about that. The Holy Spirit is our Teacher and is referred to as our Teacher. God does not teach. So the lesson really is saying that all things are lessons that the presence of God, or the Voice, the Holy Spirit, would have me learn. The Holy Spirit is the memory of God's Love and represents God's presence in the mind. When we identify with that memory of Love, we look out from that point of view and see that Love reflected everywhere.

Even more to the point, these lessons explain that they are about purpose. The lessons are saying that the purpose of God, or the purpose of the Holy Spirit, is in everything I see, because it is in my mind. In other words, every single thing in this world becomes a classroom. The ego sees the world as a prison from which we can never escape, while the Holy Spirit sees the world as a classroom which teaches us not only that we do not have to escape, but that we are not even here. The purpose of everything in the world from the ego's point of view is to imprison us still further in the ego thought system. Once we believe there is something real in the world, we are saying separation is real, the ego is real, and God is not real, etc. That is why the ego made up the world—to be an attack on God.

What the ego made, the Holy Spirit now uses to turn the tables on the ego. The world becomes a classroom in which we ultimately learn there is no world. That is what this is talking about: the purpose of God is in the world. Not that it is literally in the world itself, because there is no world itself. The purpose of God is in the mind. But because we believe we are in the world, and we have taken ourselves from the mind into the world, we have also taken that memory of God's Love from the mind into the world and into the body.

So when the Course says that the smallest grain of sand is part of God's Son, it does not mean literally that everything physical is part of the Sonship. Again, that would make the dream real. It means that everything in the physical world is a projection of the thought of the ego which is in the mind, but also contained in the mind is that memory of God's Love. The Course is not saying that we should reverence or worship the different forms that are in this world. The world is not holy, the earth is not holy, people are not holy. Nothing is holy in this world, because there is nothing here. The world is not holy, but it is also not unholy either.

To make anything in this world real and important is to fall into the trap of making the error real. The idea is that we do not join with the dream. We talked about this earlier. We do not join with the dream, we join with the dreamer. And the dreamer is the mind, where the Love of God is and where the hatred of the ego is. We learn that just as we had chosen the hatred of the ego to be reality, we can now change our minds and choose the Love of God as our reality. What makes everything in this world holy is the purpose that we give it, not the world itself.

Many people think that certain objects or certain places are holy. It is true, for example, that crystals have a certain electromagnetic force about them and within them, but people confuse that with spirituality. If we really take literally—the Course tells us we do—the first law of chaos of the ego—that there is a hierarchy of illusions—then we look at a crystal and say it has more spiritual power or spiritual force than an ordinary rock or a piece of stone. Or similarly, there may be a certain place in the world that has a power point, as opposed to another one, and so we call it a sacred spot.

The holiest spot in all the earth is in the mind, which the Course refers to several times as the altar. It is easy to begin to see, from the Course's point of view, all the mistakes people fall into, when you recognize that literally nothing in this world is real—everything is a dream. The Course means it literally when it asks that we not share in others' dreams, whether they are dreams of the holiness of sacred places or sacred people or sacred objects or sacred minerals, or dreams which seem to be attacking. Jesus is asking us not to join with the dream—not to give it any reality or any power. Rather, we look towards the dreamer, where the power is.

Let me read that line again: "The forms the broken pieces seem to take mean nothing." Yet the forms are legion. They are the forms of homo sapiens, of other animals, of vegetables, of minerals—all these are forms. Earlier, near the end of "The Laws of Chaos," the Course says, "There is no life outside of Heaven" (T-23.II.19:1). That is another of those statements meant to be taken quite literally. The division that we make between animate and inanimate is illusory. Of course we do not stop with that. We have an extensive classification system according to which we classify everything that is animate, all the different forms of life—the Great Chain of Being, as people refer to it—and all the different forms of inanimate beings. All we are doing is dividing up the illusion more and more and more. And we never find the answer to what is life, because the answer is not found here. The answer is found in the mind, where we choose to turn against life towards death. When we turn back to life, towards the Holy Spirit, we begin to understand what life is and what it is not. That does not mean that anything in this world is unholy or that to study any of these forms is wrong, as long as we study them with a smile on our face.

Again, the final line of that paragraph: "And every aspect of the Son of God is just the same as every other part." There is no hierarchy of illusions.

**Part XVIII
Commentary on the Section "The Greater Joining" (T-28.IV.10)**

**Join not your brother's dreams but join with him** [his mind, not his body or his dreams]**, and where you join His Son the Father is.**

The real importance of this statement can be grasped by probing it more deeply. If it is true, as this says, that when I join with you I will find God—and yet it is God that I am so afraid of, because my ego has told me I do not want to come face to face with Him at all because His wrath and His vengeance will destroy me—then the way that I keep Him away is to keep you away. That is why we all have so much trouble truly joining, which means truly letting go of all the barriers that separate us. And that is why we have such a tremendously strong and deep investment in special relationships—they keep the Love of God away.

Similarly, the Course says that "the memory of God comes to the quiet mind" (T-23.I.1:1). If I do not want to go anywhere near the memory of God, because that—as I have come to believe—is the memory of my sin and the awesome nature of my guilt, not to mention God's fury, then all I have to do is keep my mind busy, so that it is no longer quiet. It is always going, always thinking, always making what the Course refers to as "raucous shrieks" (W-pI.49.4:3). We are terrified, if our mind is quiet, that God will rush in, which, of course, is true.

It is the same idea as that of the ego filling in the little gap with all its seeds of pestilence, sin, guilt, and sickness. If the gap is wiped clean, the ego tells us, God will come in, which, again, is true. If I am afraid of God, which the ego has taught me to believe I should be (we all believed right at the beginning that He is to be feared), then the way to keep Him away is to keep ourselves angry, to keep the mind noisy, to keep ourselves preoccupied with everything that means nothing at all. And so we keep ourselves sick, worried, concerned, guilty, etc.—their value is to keep God away.

That is why, the Course says, we are attracted to guilt, pain, and death (T-19.IV-A,B,C). We think we are afraid of them. In reality, we are attracted to them, because they keep the Love of God—which the ego has told us is not love at all but wrath—away from us.

However, if we are serious about wanting to go back home and could experience the yearning to hear that forgotten song again—to know God's Love, to take Jesus' hand and to walk back with him—then we would demonstrate our seriousness by letting go of all the grievances that we hold against each other. We would let go of our investment in joining with others' dreams, whether they be dreams of alliances against others or against God, or alliances to prove that sickness and pain are real, or above all, alliances to prove that we are not responsible for what we think or feel or what happens to us—someone else is responsible. If we truly want to know God and to come back home, we have to come back to where we originally left, the mind.

That is the home we return to first, our home away from home. It is in that place in the mind where we chose against the Holy Spirit that we can now choose for Him. That then is really our home away from home, because that is our home with the Holy Spirit—the real world. We get there by letting go of all our investments in being right about how we have judged the world and everything in it, especially ourselves, realizing that we are not the innocent victims. That is what false empathy fosters—the idea that people are victimized—these poor, poor people who suffer in the world. That kind of an attitude is not loving.

**Who seeks for substitutes when he perceives he has lost nothing?**

This is a reference to special relationships, which begin with the idea that we have lost the innocence of Christ. We believe there is something missing in us, something is lacking. We do not believe God is going to give it to us—and the reason God has it is that He stole it from us in the first place. So we have to get it from other people, and that is specialness.

One of the key words that the Course uses, as it does here, as a synonym for special relationships, is "substitute." We substitute somebody or something in the world for the Love and the peace of God. This includes both people as well as addictions, for example. I feel this great hole of anxiety in my stomach and I cannot function. God's peace is not going to do; I do not want God's peace because I believe it will destroy me. So I take some substance which will dull the pain, whether it is aspirin, alcohol, food, cocaine, or whatever. I take something that will dull the pain and cut into all that anxiety and terror—that becomes a substitute for God. Or I feel lonely. I do not want to look at the cause of my loneliness, which is that I have separated from God and have left home. So I take in other bodies,—I attract other bodies who will keep me from being lonely. That is the meaning of this passage—I seek for substitutes because I feel something is missing in me. When I rejoin Jesus or the Holy Spirit in my mind, then I remember that I have everything, because I already have the Love and the peace of God. I do not have to seek for anything else as a substitute.

**Who would want to have the "benefits" of sickness when he has received the simple happiness of health?**

"Benefits" is put in quotes because, obviously, the benefits are not real. Health really means the peace of God. Near the beginning of the text, Jesus says that "health is inner peace" (T-2.I.5:4). This is an important idea that can be extremely helpful. When we are sick and in pain—whether we are talking about physical pain or emotional pain—it helps us to realize that we have chosen it. If we have chosen it, there is a reason we chose it. We chose it because we wanted to keep the Love of God away from us.

The question Jesus is asking us is: Is this really what you want? Do you really want what you are getting from being sick and unhappy and feeling unfairly treated and victimized, when instead you could have the health that comes from inner peace? The answer that we would have to give if we are honest is: Yes, I do want to be miserable, and I do not want to be happy. I prefer to be right in my misery than to be happy and to say that I was wrong, that God is not my enemy, God is my friend.

This, basically, is another way of boiling the Course down to a very simple idea. Whenever we are feeling unhappy, whatever the reason, whatever the form, it is because we have said: I do not value God's Love—I value anger, I value being right, I value victimization, I value pain. All we have to do at that point is recognize that that is what we have chosen. We do not have to try to make another choice, or force ourselves to change. We simply have to be aware and to look at the fact that if I am angry, upset, or anxious, it is because I have chosen it—at that particular point in my insanity, I value that more than I value the love of Jesus. I would much rather be with another body, in pain or in specialness, than to be with him. We simply have to say: Yes, that is what I have chosen—and then be able to look at that choice without judgment, either of ourselves or of anyone else.

The very fact that we are all here in this world—or believe that we are here in this world—is telling us what we all have chosen. We all have said we prefer to be in this world, in a body, than to be without a body and to be home in Heaven. Since no one has the power to do anything to us or for us except ourselves, the fact that we are all here is saying we have all answered that we prefer to be right rather than happy. Because it is a fact within the dream that we are all here, it follows that everything else we do will represent the same choice, until we change our minds.

The idea is to be able to accept full responsibility for what we are feeling and experiencing. That is why my joining with you in empathy for your pain and suffering does not help—it reinforces what you have chosen and says: Yes, indeed, you are right. You have made the decision not to be happy, and now I am going along with it, too. We both now believe that we are even more right than before, because we have reinforced that decision. And then, of course, we want to find many other people who agree. That is why you see in the world at large how quickly everybody gets on the bandwagon to identify with the innocent victims. For example, there was a young girl trapped in a well a couple of years ago—everyone wanted to canonize her. She did nothing except fall into a well. But people were going to make her into a little saint. Falling into the well was her mind's choice, so it is not helpful to identify with her as the victim. But that is how insane everyone in the world is.

**What God has given cannot be a loss, and what is not of Him has no effects.**

What is not of Him is everything of the ego. And if it has had no effects, then it cannot be a cause; and if it is not a cause it does not exist. So absolutely everything that is not of God has no effects at all. Even the form of the Holy Spirit—Whom the Course occasionally speaks of as being given by God—is an illusion in our minds. The Clarification of Terms says that the Voice of the Holy Spirit is not Who He is (C-6.1:4-5). So even the effects of the Holy Spirit's presence—the happy dreams—are not real and in the end disappear.

**What, then, would you perceive within the gap? The seeds of sickness come from the belief that there is joy in separation, and its giving up would be a sacrifice.**

The "seeds of sickness" are what we have made real within the gap. We have all chosen the joy of the ego instead of the joy of God. Jesus says we really think there is a difference between pleasure and pain in this world, because we want to prove that the body is real. What we call pleasure or joy is exactly the same as pain—it is just its flip side. Both are predicated on the belief in the reality of the body—its satisfactions or its aversions, so both make the body real. Since within the dream we have identified with the dream and have become the dream, and therefore have become this limited, suffering, and sacrificial self, we believe that to give up the gap of separation would be a sacrifice, because it would mean the end of our identity as an ego self. That is why we cling so much to always being right, to being angry and justifying our anger, and to justifying our being in a body, making the body real, and being preoccupied with it. We cling to our bodily identification because that is what we believe we are, and that is why we then fight—whether we do it actively or subtly—against forgiving, against letting go of grievances, against letting go of our investment in sickness, in fact, against letting go of our belief in the reality of sickness.

That is also why people have so much trouble with the idea in the Course that God did not create the world. If that is true—that He did not create the world—it means that He had nothing to do with the body. And if God had nothing to do with any of this, that means it does not exist. And if it does not exist, it means that I do not exist. And so, rather than give up this false self that I believe is my identity, I cling to it even more. That is why the ego says it is a sacrifice to give up the notion that the seeds of sickness—sin and guilt—in this little gap are real.

**But miracles are the result when you do not insist on seeing in the gap what is not there.**

The miracle helps us take our attention from the world where we believe the effects of sickness—the seeds of sickness—are, and go back into the mind where we can now look. Thus, we go back to the mind and look at what we have chosen. The ego, as we know, never lets us look at what we have chosen. But now we look at it and say: This is insane; I do not want this anymore. At this point we can start the process of making another choice. But we first have to look at what the ego's gifts have been. We do not look within the mind as long as we believe that the world is real and that dreams and sickness and victimization are real. And our investment in victimization is enormous. In fact, it is the same as our investment in the entirety of the ego thought system.

**Your willingness to let illusions go is all the Healer of God's Son requires.**

This is another of those important themes of the Course—the little willingness that the Holy Spirit asks of us. He does not ask a great willingness, and the little willingness that he asks of us is simply to begin the process of questioning the validity of what we have made real—the dream and our identifying the dreamer with the dream. That is the little willingness. We are not asked to let all illusions go. We are simply asked to have the willingness to let them go. And the willingness means we are willing simply to look.

If I can look at my dream and my reactions to you, the "I" that is looking cannot be the dream. It must be the dreamer of the dream. And if I look at the dream without judgment, anger, and guilt, then obviously I am not looking with my ego, which automatically means I am looking with Jesus or the Holy Spirit. And if I am looking with them, I have already begun the process of undoing the separation, which was the cause of the problem in the first place.

So the willingness is simply the willingness to say that, just perhaps, I was wrong. Therefore, when I am involved with you and you get upset or sick, and I find myself having a reaction to you—feeling annoyed or guilty or anxious or fearful because of you—whatever the form of my reaction, anything that is not peaceful—then all I have to do is recognize "I am never upset for the reason I think" (W-pI.5.heading). I am not upset because of you. I am upset because of what I have chosen, and I am simply using your situation as a scapegoat, so that I do not have to look at my own responsibility for how I feel.

That is how I begin to move away from identifying with your dream and to show you, as well as myself, that your dream has had no effect on me. That is what helps me get back to the decision maker in my mind that chose to be upset in the first place—which means I am now identifying with the dreamer in my mind. And that is how I help heal you, because I become the reminder of the dreamer that is in you.

**He will place the seeds of healing where the seeds of sickness were. And there will be no loss, but only gain.**

Basically what we are doing is transferring, or shifting, from the nightmare dreams of the ego to the happy dreams of the Holy Spirit—from the nightmare dreams of sickness to the happy dreams of healing. Since the ego has told us that to accept healing, to accept the undoing of the ego, to accept the Atonement will be a loss—a loss of myself—we are taught here that there will not be any loss at all, but there will be gain. In other words, the Holy Spirit is our friend and not our enemy.

We can see how the Christian world projected its unconscious ego on to Jesus. The lesson of the cross and the message of the Churches has always been that God wants us to give up things. There is that line in John's Gospel, which, obviously, Jesus never could have said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13). There is no love in that. That is sacrifice. That statement clearly implies that there is a loss. And so the great love that Jesus had for the world was that he laid down his life. But he could not lay down a life that he never had in the first place, because "there is no life outside of Heaven" (T-23.II.19:1).

The world, which is nothing more than one specific form of the ego thought system, put into the mouth of Jesus, or the mouth of God, is the idea that God demands loss. If we want to reap the benefits of His Kingdom and to be welcomed back into His House, we have to let go of things. We have to lose. So this line is a correction for the idea that God demands loss.

There is no loss at all. God does not ask us to give up anything at all, except our belief in the reality of guilt. That is all we are asked to give up. He is not asking us to give up anything in the dream, because that would be absurd. If God or the Holy Spirit asked us to give up anything in the dream, there would have to be a dream. We are not asked to give up anything in the dream. We are simply asked to give up our investment in there being something in the dream.

That is another way of saying that the Holy Spirit does not take the special relationship away from us—He transforms it (T-17.IV.2:3). We are not asked to give up anything in the world. We are simply asked to transform our thinking about it, by looking through the eyes of the Holy Spirit rather than the eyes of the ego.

**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 world, which is nothing more than one specific form of the ego thought system, put into the mouth of Jesus, or the mouth of God, is the idea that God demands loss. If we want to reap the benefits of His Kingdom and to be welcomed back into His House, we have to let go of things. We have to lose. So this line is a correction for the idea that God demands loss.

There is no loss at all. God does not ask us to give up anything at all, except our belief in the reality of guilt. That is all we are asked to give up. He is not asking us to give up anything in the dream, because that would be absurd. If God or the Holy Spirit asked us to give up anything in the dream, there would have to be a dream. We are not asked to give up anything in the dream. We are simply asked to give up our investment in there being something in the dream.

That is another way of saying that the Holy Spirit does not take the special relationship away from us—He transforms it (T-17.IV.2:3). We are not asked to give up anything in the world. We are simply asked to transform our thinking about it, by looking through the eyes of the Holy Spirit rather than the eyes of the ego.

**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 understandthe 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.

**Part XX
T-2.IV.5**

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

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

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

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

In effect, the woman in the hospital bed was saying, "I believe I am separate from God, and the fear of that is overwhelming. The only way that I can accept love and forgiveness for what I have accused myself of doing is to have people be nice to me and to comfort my sick body and my sick brain, in terms of all the distress I am feeling." In other words, simply by the fact that she is sick and in pain, she was saying, "This is the form in which I will accept love; this is the only form that I can accept love in at this time." The people coming in to see her would hear that, if they were coming without an investment.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I think that example is extremely helpful. During all those years, her fear of Jesus was great and her need to shop was important as a defense. This is no different from the need to have cancer or AIDS, or the anxieties and worries that we all have—it does not make any difference. There is no order of difficulty in defenses. They are all the same. Helen's need for her defense was so great that Jesus did not try to take it away or break it down. He joined with her. Now this is the same person who dictated A Course in Miracles, and who tells us to be aware of all the trinkets that we put upon our body to "bait another fish." And yet he was helping her do the very same thing. Jesus was joining with Helen in the illusion, until the time when her fear had lessened enough that she could let go of the defense. She could then experience his saying to her, "Don't go shopping anymore," and it was not a problem. If she had heard that ten years earlier, it would have driven her up a wall—and she would have shopped with even more of a vengeance than she already had done.

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

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

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

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

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

**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-pII.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-pI.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-pI.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.

**Part XXII
Commentary on Lesson 184 "The Name of God is my inheritance"
(paragraph 10, continued)**

To consider a different kind of example of how we see problems outside ourselves, students in classes here sometimes report sadness or anxiety as programs are coming to an end and the time to leave the Foundation approaches. If this happens to you, it means that you believe the peace and the love that you are feeling when you are here are not in you. You feel it is here at the Foundation, and you have gotten it from this place. Then when you leave, you believe you are leaving the peace behind, because it is not in you. What you want to do—and this would be a good example of how to work with this—you would then be aware: Oh, I am anxious about leaving because I believe my happiness and peace and love are based here at the Foundation and are not within me—obviously I do not feel worthy.

Now this means that you believe the Foundation has something you do not have—the Foundation has the love of Jesus and you do not have it because you are not worthy to have it. That is not a very nice statement to make about yourself, nor is it a very nice statement to make about the Foundation, because if we have it and you do not, where did we get it? You then feel the only way to get it back is to cannibalize the Foundation. So you may say, "I have to be here all the time so that I can have this love, because I do not have it any other way." That is when your relationship to the Foundation would be one of using and manipulating—basically, cannibalism.

You then want to say, "Yes, that is what I am doing," and then say to Jesus, "I do not feel that I am worthy of you." You are really saying, "I do believe that you are with me and I am frightened." You are limiting his love, just as Helen did with her shopping, by telling Jesus, "I can experience your love when I am here, because I am not here all the time—that is as much love as I can take—but I do not want your love with me when I go back home, back into the world."

What you are really telling Jesus is that you are afraid of his love. That is the bottom line, a point I am going to get into later. You recognize that your being upset or angry, your empathizing with someone's suffering, your feeling anxious or upset because you are going to leave this wonderful holy place and go back to the ugly profane world—any of those feelings, in any form, is coming because you are afraid of the love that you know really is with you. And so you use external circumstances as a way of pushing that love away. If you could experience yourself saying to Jesus, or whomever else symbolizes that love for you, "You have gotten too close and I have to push you away," then you have already done all you need to do. You are finished, because if you could say that to Jesus without judgment, then you are already joining with him. There is a part of you which is learning that you do not have to be so afraid of him. And you do not have to be so ashamed of your hatred or fear of him, or the ways you use others to keep him away. And that is all you do.

The point of all this again is that we should strive to recognize the disquiet within us as quickly as we can, try not to blame it on what is outside us, and instead go back to that place of sunlight in our minds. But, again, this means that we must accept the premise that we do not know what we are doing.

There is a wonderful passage right near the end of the text that beautifully expresses this:

There is no statement that the world is more afraid to hear than this: I do not know the thing I am, and therefore do not know what I am doing, where I am, or how to look upon the world or on myself. [Now, that is a real blow to the egos in all of us.] Yet in this learning [in accepting this] is salvation born. And What you are will tell you of Itself (T-31.V.17:6-9).

So the Self that we are will tell us Who we are through the Holy Spirit. Salvation comes from this because it is the statement that my ego has been wrong. This means I now leave that little gap in my mind free and clear and empty and vacant, and that allows the Love of the Holy Spirit to teach me. But I must be able to say, "The problem is not what I thought it was." In other words, I must go back into my mind.

To consider another way of understanding all this: When I feel I am helping you, I believe I am giving you a gift. You are in tremendous need and tremendous pain and suffering, and I am the giver of the gift—I am going to give you something. I am going to relieve you of your pain. Once again, this means that I have something that you do not have. So I am seeing separation and difference. I am making a judgment that really is an attack—seemingly an expression of love and concern, but it is really an attack. I believe I am giving you the gift. Once I feel that way, I have made the mistake—how could I give you the gift when I do not know who I am, let alone what I am doing, or what the problem is? I have to recognize—and I can only do this by going back in my mind and joining with Jesus—that I am not the gift as a separated ego, as a personality that I identify with. The gift that I am is the gift of Christ, the gift of God's Love. That is the gift I am. But not only am I that gift, you are that gift as well. Basically, all I am is love sharing with love. Not love giving to another person, but love sharing with itself. I am not the gift. I am not the giver of the gift. I am nothing, because that is what the ego is. But within me is everything.

There is a workbook lesson that ends with a wonderful line: "Let me remember that myself is nothing and that my Self is all" (W-pII.358.1:7). The arrogance of the ego is evident in the thought that I have this wonderful gift that I am going to give to you. And I am giving you something because I do not believe you have it. And if I do not believe you have it, and I believe I have it, then there is a part of me that does not want to give it to you. So the gift I am giving to you has a hook to it—I am going to give you this gift so I can get an even greater gift back. I am going to give you the gift so that you, or everybody else in the world will think I am so wonderful, and I really want God to think I am so wonderful, so He will let me off the hook and punish somebody else. It is not love if I give you a gift that I do not believe you already have. Seeing differences is always judgment.

The gift that I give is not mine; it is given through me. It is a gift that simply mirrors and shares with the one who is receiving it. It is an exchange in which nothing is given, nothing is gained, and nothing is lost. Love is simply acknowledged and accepted. It comes in a form in which I give something and another person receives it. That is the form. That is the symbol. If someone is sick and I relieve that person of pain, I have given that person something on the level of form.

But, remember, the form does not mean anything. To the ego it is a symbol of my giving and losing, and your gaining. It is a symbol of separation, difference, judgment, and attack. It is not love. It is not giving. When it is Jesus giving through me, the form, or the symbol, is the reflection of that love. And my experience is that I am simply letting love extend through me, which means I have no demand that anything be given back to me. I have no demand that my gifts be accepted. I have no demand that you be healed of your physical symptom. I have no demand that you be grateful to me. I have no expectation, no need. It is love simply being given through me.

Now, obviously, this is the ideal—it is not easy. But the idea is at least to be aware of what the ideal is and then to be aware when you fall short of it. I will go into that shortly. The idea is to realize that I am not the giver of the gift. When I go back to the place of light in my mind, which we will see as we read on, then I realize what the gift is and Who the Giver of the gift is. I am simply an expression of that gift—and an expression and a fragment of the Giver, as is everyone else. It is simply, again, an exchange of love with love.

And when we do that here is what happens:

**(Paragraph 10 - Sentence 2) Here you understand the Word, the Name which God has given you; the one Identity which all things share; the one acknowledgment of what is true.**

The "here" that starts this sentence refers again to our going back to that part of our minds where we had made the wrong choice. We are faced with the same choice, but now know that we have a choice—between the ego and the Holy Spirit—and we also see that we have turned away from the ego and towards Jesus. This is another way of understanding the concept discussed earlier: that when I separate myself from my dream and from your dream, and go back to the idea that we are both dreamers, I recognize in that idea that we are all one. That is the key teaching here: "the one Identity which all things share." We are all part of the separated Sonship. We are all part of that diseased, sick, insane mind that believed we would be happier outside Heaven than in Heaven.

Thus, I go beyond the darkness of the world—whether this is someone who has physically or verbally attacked me, or someone who is seriously ill, or in some dire form of distress. If I identify with that, I am making the dream real. I want to go back to that place in my mind where the dreamer is—I as the dreamer, and my friend as the dreamer—and then realize that we are the same. The forms of our mistake differ, but the content of the mistake is the same. We all turned away from Heaven as one, we all turned away from the Holy Spirit as one. And now, within our seemingly fragmented and individual minds, we have all also turned away from Jesus—not as one in form, but we all have turned away from that presence of love. We know we all have done it because everybody in this world gets angry, annoyed, sick, depressed, guilty, etc. All of these are conscious choices we make to turn away from the Love of God. We are all in the same boat. And so when we leave the world of darkness, if only for a split second, and go back to our mind, that split second is what the Course refers to as "the holy instant." The holy instant lifts us outside time, because when we join with the Love of God, we remember that that Love is eternal.

So, to go over this one final time: I find myself in a situation in which I am beginning to get upset. I am feeling sorry for you because of the condition that you are in and I want to do something about it—or I am angry over something you have done and I want to do something about it. Then I catch myself, I realize what the problem is, I go back to that place of light in my mind, and all of a sudden everything looks different. I realize that whatever you are going through is a choice that you have made. Your distress is not the pain in your body. The distress is the pain in your mind that separated from God, which mirrors mine. At that point we become one, and my concern about you, my investment in helping you, my empathy, my sympathy, my compassion for you, all disappear in that instant. For they arise only from the ego's point of view.

**(Paragraph 10 - Sentence 3) And then step back to darkness, not because you think it real, but only to proclaim its unreality in terms which still have meaning in the world that darkness rules.**

Once my mind has been healed, I can go back into the world—this whole process, once again, does not have to take more than a second or two. But now I am not fooled by the symbols. I know that your sickness and your pain came from your call for the Love of God, which is the echo of my call for the Love of God. I am not taken in by the dream anymore. It is not the dream I want to help, it is the call for the Love of God that I want to answer. And I understand that by answering your call for the Love of God, I am also answering my own. Now that I am not taken in by the symbols of the world, I can use them for a totally different purpose.

Applying this again to the situation of my visiting you in the hospital, and you are in a lot of pain—in the past I would have walked into the room and gotten upset. So I do this little exercise: I go back into my mind, I realize now I could walk into that room with Jesus next to me instead of walking in all by myself. I realize you have chosen sickness as your way of defending against God's Love, so you have defined the form of the classroom. Because I am now in a state of mind in which I recognize that you and I are both one, and we are one in the Love of God, I let that Love of God come through me. I use the symbols that you have made, but with a different content. You used those symbols as a way of excluding God, of attacking yourself, and of making me feel guilty. I now use those same symbols as an expression of the Love of God that says no matter what you have done, it has had no effect on my love for you. And so I will do what most normal people would do—I will say words of sympathy, of encouragement, and of comfort. I will bring you flowers or candy. I will call the doctor for you. I will do everything that everyone else does, but the purpose will be totally different, because I will not be doing it as a way of empathizing with your dream. I will be doing it as a vehicle for expressing the Love of God that I realize we both share and we both are.

At this point I would look just like any other person, but the meaning of what is going on would be totally different. That is what is meant by the statement earlier in the workbook that says that we are to look like everyone else, but smile more frequently (W-pI.155.1:2). In other words, there is a peace inside that is not susceptible to being taken away because of someone else's dream.

That principle can be applied to absolutely every situation in which I find myself—whether I am angry at you, angry at myself, or I feel empathic with you because of your suffering and distress. It does not mean I do not do things to help others. It simply means that I now realize that I am not the "doer." I am not the giver of the gift. I am not the one who is going to bring peace to the world or find the cure to all the sickness in the world, because I realize that all of that is just another part of the dream. So I allow myself to be part of the dream, knowing that I am the dreamer and not the dream.

This sentence therefore is so vitally important: "Then step back to darkness, not because you think it real." Not because I think sending flowers means anything, or taking an aspirin means anything, but I do it simply "to proclaim the unreality of the darkness in terms which still have meaning in the world that darkness rules." I do not let the forms be any hindrance to the love that is within me. That is what love in this world really means.

Again, it does not mean I turn my back on others' suffering, or on injustice in the world, or on anything else. I simply redefine them so that I realize the suffering and injustice come from within your mind just as they come from within my mind. When I recognize that, I join with you as the dreamer, not as the dream.

**(Paragraph 11 - Sentence 1) Use all the little names and symbols which delineate the world of darkness.**

A good example of this is A Course in Miracles itself. In the Course, Jesus uses the words and symbols of the western world, a Christian world and a psychological world—not because those words are true. He uses words, as we know, that Christians have used for centuries, but he totally redefines them. That is what he means when he says that the Course comes "within the ego framework" (C-in.3:1). But he changes the content. So "Son of God" has a meaning totally different from that of the past two thousand years. "Christ" has a totally different meaning. "Atonement" has a totally different meaning. "Salvation" has a totally different meaning. The "miracle" is something totally different. "Forgiveness" is totally different. He uses the exact same words: "the Second Coming," "the Last Judgment"—words emotionally loaded with specialness, with special love, with special hate and judgment. He turns them around and they now become vehicles for teaching a lesson which is universal and embraces all people as one. And he himself becomes the perfect example of that reversal of content. So again:

**(Paragraph 11 - Sentences 1-2) Use all the names and symbols which delineate the world of darkness. Yet accept them not as your reality.**

Do not be taken in by the dream. You are not the dream. Thus, for example, I can give you medication if I am a doctor, or I can take you to a doctor who will give you medication. This does not mean that I am making the error real. Likewise, I can bring you flowers because you are sick; but again, this does not mean that I am empathizing with you falsely. It means that I am joining with you in the symbols which are meaningful for you and for me, but I am not forgetting that we have a meaning that is beyond all the symbols.

That is why, from the Course's perspective, there is no right or wrong way of doing anything in this world, as Hamlet proclaimed in his wonderful statement: "There is nothing right or wrong but thinking makes it so." There is absolutely no behavior in this world that is right, and none that is wrong. There is no right way or wrong way of doing therapy with the Course—there is no technique. There is no right way or wrong way of doing the Course. All there is is a right way of thinking in our mind—and a wrong way of thinking. There is the right Teacher we should identify with and the wrong teacher. To say right or wrong is not a judgment based upon morality—it is a judgment that says that if I choose the ego I will not be happy, if I choose the Holy Spirit I will be happy. "By their fruits you shall know them"—that is how we evaluate, not according to right or wrong in terms of behavior.

**(Paragraph 11 - Sentence 3) The Holy Spirit uses all of them** [the words and symbols of the world] **but He does not forget creation has one Name, one Meaning, and a single Source which unifies all things within Itself.**

That is why it is so terribly important, as I said right at the beginning of the workshop, that we recognize what the Course's metaphysics is really teaching. The entire world is an illusion, which means nothing here is real. That means the whole perception of differences in this world is made up. What unifies everything in this world is that it comes from one source—guilt. And guilt comes from one source—it is a defense against God's Love. Everything here is an expression either of the ego's guilt or of the Holy Spirit's Love. We are all one, we are not different; we only have the illusion of being different. Sickness, suffering, and pain are wonderful devices the ego uses to keep us separate. You are suffering, I am not suffering. So we are separate, we are different, and in this is an inherent judgment made—a judgment that is an attack.

I do not have to experience everybody as one—that is not possible for a human brain. It is possible, however, for me to understand that we all share the same purpose. We are all different in form, but we all share the same purpose—that is what is important—that is what unifies. So we do not deny what our eyes see. There is an important passage in the teacher's manual which is extremely helpful. If you find yourself or those in your Course in Miracles circle saying, "I am not sick, you are not sick, we are all one, and I do not see your body I just see a white light," you are either in denial or you are on the verge of a psychosis if that is what you see. We are not asked to deny what we see. This passage is a wonderful way of describing that

**Part XXIII
Concluding Excerpts**

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The context of the passage—**M-8.6:1-6**—is someone whose mind has been healed.

**(Paragraph 6 - Sentence 1) The body's eyes will continue to see differences.**

We are not asked to deny what our eyes see. We are not asked to deny that, on the level of form, in the world of symbols and names, we all have different names and we are all different.

**(Paragraph 6 - Sentence 2) But the mind that has let itself be healed will no longer acknowledge them.**

Actually, the phrase "let itself be healed" is important. The mind has not been healed, because we are already healed. We have simply allowed the healing of the Holy Spirit to be itself. And this is the double vision that I was talking about—I see the world and all the differences here, but my mind automatically corrects what I see. I recognize that all the differences are just different ways of expressing the unity of the ego-separated mind, which in itself is a defense against the unity of the Christ Mind. And we share them both. Within the dream we share the ego mind and in reality we share Christ.

**(Paragraph 6 - Sentence 3) There will be those who seem to be "sicker" than others, and the body's eyes will report their changed appearances as before.**

We are not asked to deny that someone is dying of AIDS or cancer, or someone's body has been mangled in an automobile accident, and looks different from a body that has not been in an accident; nor are we asked to deny that in the world some people are sicker than others—someone who is schizophrenic is sicker than someone who is not.

**(Paragraph 6 - Sentence 4) But the healed mind will put them all in one category; they are unreal.**

Those who are extremely sick, those who are moderately sick, those who are slightly sick, and those who are reasonably healthy—they are all unreal

**(Paragraph 6 - Sentences 5-6) This is the gift of its Teacher [the Holy Spirit]; the understanding that only two categories are meaningful in sorting out the messages the mind receives from what appears to be the outside world. And of these two, but one is real.**

Again, we are not asked to deny what we see. We are simply asked to put everything into one of two categories—either an expression of love or a call for love. The ego sees many different categories, with everyone and everything expressing separation and differences, which are unreal. The Holy Spirit sees everyone and everything as all the same—we are all children of love. Some of us express it and some of us call for it. But the reality is that we are all one in that love. Even though we use different symbols and believe we exist in different forms, we all share the same basic content—we are all Sons of the same God, which means we are all one.

We are not asked to deny what we see—we do not deny what the dream is. We simply say we are not the dream. That is all. That is the double vision. When Jesus was here he saw what everybody else saw, but his experience was totally different. He saw people killing his body, his eyes perceived differences, but his mind did not react to the differences because his mind knew only the Love of Christ. And so he only experienced the love of the Sonship calling out for the love that it believed it did not have. The Course is asking us—and this, in a sense, is what the training of the Course, which is a process, is all about—to be aware that what we are seeing is not what the reality is.

Now, you may find yourself thinking, "This all sounds perfectly well and good, but I am afraid that I am not Jesus, and so I am not up to seeing the world the way he does." But we are not asked to see the world as he does. We are asked simply to want to see the world as he does. There is a passage in the Course that says that the question we should ask ourselves is, "Do I really wish to see him [my brother] sinless?" (T-20.VII.9:2). It does not say that I see him sinless. The question is do I want to see him sinless? That is the little willingness.

So when you are dying of cancer or AIDS and your body is withering away in front of me, I am not asked to see you as perfectly healed and whole. If I could see you perfectly healed and whole I would not be here, and I would not need A Course in Miracles. That is where students get caught. I am asked to see you just the way that I see you, but to be aware that I am seeing you this way because I am afraid of seeing the Love of God in me. Forget about seeing the Love of God in you—I am afraid of seeing the Love of God in me. I am afraid of letting that love get too close to me. I am not asked to see you healed. I am not asked to see you as perfect. I am asked simply to have the little willingness to be told that I am wrong, and that the dream in front of me is simply a dream, and that the reality is the dreamer, not the dream itself. So when I find myself getting upset, the worst thing in the world that I can do as a student of A Course in Miracles is to feel guilty because I am upset. The purpose of the Course is to free us from guilt, not to make us even guiltier. The Course teaches us that to be free from guilt we need to accept that we are guilty and to say that that is all right. Jesus says in the text, "You are not guiltless in time, but in eternity" (T-13.I.3:2). He expects us to be guilty. He expects us to get upset when a loved one is sick or dying. He expects us to get upset by what goes on in the world. He expects us to get upset when we feel attacked or unfairly treated. We are not asked not to experience these feelings. We are simply asked to understand that experiencing in that way is coming from a choice that we have made—and it is a choice to push Jesus away. That is what we are asked to understand.

There is one of those places in the text where the whole course is summarized in one sentence: "All that is needed is that you look upon the problem as it is, and not the way that you have set it up" (T-27.VII.2:2). The context of the passage is suffering—all the suffering that we experience in the world, whether it is the suffering of others or our own suffering. The ego tells us that this is a suffering from which we can never escape—the world is a prison in which, as the workbook says later, "starved and thirsty creatures come to die" (W-pII.13.5:1). That is this world from the ego's point of view. And there is no way out, because we all know we are going to die. I may think I can lessen my suffering a little by making you suffer more, but in the end I know I am going to die. So Jesus tells us, "Now you are being shown you can escape" (T-27.VII.2:1).

Now, in this one line, just as I read earlier from "The Gifts of God," Jesus tells us how we can escape from all the suffering in the world—whether it is the suffering I perceive outside me that I identify with and feel sorry for and want to heal, or the suffering I experience within myself. This is all we have to do: "All that is needed is that you look upon the problem as it is, and not the way that you have set it up" (T-27.VII.2:2). The way that we have set up the problem is to see it outside us.

For example, say I have a friend who is sick and in pain or is dying—that is the problem. And I feel I have to do something about that problem. Basically, we have set up all things in the world so that we are upset because something has been done to us, or something has been done to someone or a group of people with whom we identify. Psychologically, it makes no difference whether the suffering is happening to me, to a loved one, or to a group with which I identify half way around the world. That is how we have set it up. I am in pain and am suffering because of something the body—mine or yours—has done to me. The truth is, I am upset because I first became afraid of the closeness of Jesus to me, so I dropped his hand and pushed him away, and I then felt terrible—because once again I have abandoned, rejected, and turned away from love. Then I project the responsibility for how I feel on to you, saying you are the reason I am feeling upset. Because you are dying of cancer or AIDS, or something awful has happened to you, I cannot sleep at night. I feel bereft and abandoned, lonely, upset, guilty, etc., and it is your fault. I have set up the problem so that my dis-ease is the effect of what you have done to me or what is happening to you. Jesus is saying that all that I have to do is see the problem as it is—I am the one who abandoned love, who turned away from it, and that is why I am feeling the way I am.

Going back to our earlier example—I am feeling wonderful and joined and loving and loved while here at the Foundation. And I am afraid that when I leave here all that love will be gone. The way I have set up the problem is that if I stay here I will feel happy and peaceful and I will feel the closeness of Jesus, but if I leave here these feelings will be gone. That means the cause of my distress is not anything I am doing. The cause of my distress is a circumstance beyond my control. I cannot help it if I have a job that I have to go back to. This is not something I have done—it is simply the circumstances that I am leaving this place and so I am leaving love behind. All that I have to do to escape from the suffering that I am feeling is to look at the problem as it is—the way that I had described it earlier. The problem is that Iam the one who is pushing Jesus away. I am the one who is limiting his love, saying, "I will let you love me here, but I won't let you love me where I live."

In other words, all I have to do to be able to leave the world of darkness—which is the world of form, the world of the body—is to go back to the place in my mind where I made the decision to exclude love and to exclude or limit Jesus, and say, "Yes, that's what I'm doing." That is all I have to do. Then I have done my part for the healing of the world, for the healing of all the pain and suffering that has ever existed, is existing now, or will ever exist. And this is because all the pain and suffering—past, present and future—comes from separating from the Love of God. So my part is simply to rejoin that love, that is all—being aware of and looking at what I have done, without judgment, without blaming the Foundation, without blaming people here, without blaming myself. If I can do that, I am already joined with Jesus.

Remember the passage that we read earlier from the text. We have no other choice—we join either with the dreams of fear or with the dreams of love, either with the ego or with the Holy Spirit. There is no other choice. If we join with the ego there will be judgment. There has to be judgment because that is what the ego is—judgment. If we join with Jesus there will be no judgment, no guilt, no attack, because that is what he is. So if I can recognize that the source of my distress is not my leaving one physical place and going to another, but rather that I chose to exclude love—if I can look at that in myself without coming down hard on herself, or blaming anybody else for it, then I have looked with Jesus. I have undone my mistake. My mistake was that I had pushed Jesus away, but now I am bringing him back. And I am finished. I have let myself be healed. I have let the world be healed. Now, in the next moment I may get frightened again and drop Jesus' hand, but then I simply do the whole process all over again.

That is all that is ever asked of us. That is what it means to accept the Atonement for ourselves. Remember, all the pain and suffering in the world, regardless of how big it appears to be, no matter how many billions of people it embraces, comes simply from moving away from love in our minds, because there is nothing else. There is no world out here. The whole world rests in that little gap. Remember, the entire world arose to cover over the guilt in the little gap—the guilt that came from separating from the Love of God. And we re-enact that over and over again. That is what the Course means when it says, "each hour and minute, even each second, you are deciding between the crucifixion and the resurrection" (T-14.III.4:1). Then in a later passage it says virtually the same thing, that we choose "to relive the single instant when the time of terror took the place of love" (T-26.V.13:1). We simply re-enact that moment over and over again. But it is always the same moment, because there is only one instant. We simply, as seemingly separated fragments, re-enact that one choice over and over again. In the instant that I feel separated from the love of Jesus, I am living out the mistake of the entire world, because it is all the same. This makes no sense from this side, in the body. But when we look at it from the place of truth and look back down on it, then we understand that it is all happening at once. All I have to do is simply say, "Yes, this is what I have done. And it wasn't a sin—I am not going to be punished for it—it was simply a silly mistake." And the Love of God is with me, saying with me, "Yes, it was nothing but a silly mistake and had no consequences." The guilt that led to the making of this world—and my mind is a part of that—and to the sustaining of this world is the guilt over having separated from the Love of God, which the ego says had a disastrous consequence: God is furious. If we can have the experience of seeing ourselves turn away from love, and yet have love look with us on that sin without judgment, it is no longer a sin. And then I can say that my limiting Jesus, my pushing him away, my betraying him, my betraying this person, my betraying love, had absolutely no effect. Then it stops being a sin and becomes merely a mistake, which does not need defense. And the tiny gap has been made clean and the Love of God is there. That is all that is needed, and that solves all the pain and suffering that ever existed.

Returning now to **Lesson 184**—the final line:

**(Paragraph 11 - Sentence 4) Use all the names the world bestows on them but for convenience, yet do not forget they share the Name of God along with you.**

Nothing in this world means anything. We have given it a meaning which is murderous. When we see the world as a classroom, once we go back into the light, the symbols and the names and the words of the world become transformed by that light. And so we are asked to "use all the names the world bestows on them"—"them" would be all the seemingly separated fragments.

I will still relate to you as if you were a separated person—as if you were my mother or father, my sister or brother, my child, my spouse, my lover or friend, or my patient, my therapist, colleague, supervisor, boss, or employee, etc., etc. I will use all those names, but I will not forget that we are all part of the same Christ. That does not mean that I keep having to say the word "Christ" as I am talking to you or to envelop you in white light. It means I do not see your purpose as separate from mine. All I have to do is be aware of my temptation, my need, my investment in seeing you as separate and different from me, in order to justify my judgment of difference. I bring that to the place of light in my mind, and say to Jesus: "I am using this as a weapon, not only against my brother or sister, but against you, because I'm afraid of you." That is all I have to do. If I could do that without judgment of myself or you, them I would have accepted the Atonement. At that instant I am healed and the whole world is healed with me. That is real empathy. I am empathizing with the Love of Christ that is in you, because I have identified the Love of Christ within me.