

## THE PRACTICE OF LOVE

I said repeatedly, love one another . . . love one another. Make a point more than you've ever done before to love one another instead of what you spontaneously tend to do when you're preoccupied with yourself or your situation or with your distress with others that you're called upon to love.

To love one another means really being present with them. It means listening to them without thinking. It means listening to them so that you might simply grasp what they are simply meaning. And I promise you they are simply meaning something. You might believe that there are complex psychological factors coming into play behind what they're saying and you might think that in order to be truly loving you must discern what the complexities are so that you can bring out the answers that reduce the complexities.

Tonight I'm going to speak about one particular practice that effectively gets in the way of loving one another. And as a result, our Gathering tonight is likely to be shorter than usual. I'm only going to discuss this one facet, because if you will pay attention closely and watch yourself during the coming week, you will find that avoiding this practice will take up a great deal of your time and will also provide the – I'm going to say – engine for transformation, for making changes so that you are more able to love one another well.

Now tell me . . . when you're involved with someone and you say something and they respond and it's obvious from what they said that they didn't hear a thing you had said, it doesn't leave you with a feeling of being loved, does it. It leaves you with a feeling of being estranged, of somehow standing outside of what appears to be a relationship you're involved in because you are supposedly communicating with each other – conversing.

And so the correction to this problem lies in making a point of staying present, staying present with those you are with so that you do not leave them feeling estranged.

Staying present is another way of saying: Look at your brother with innocent eyes. Listen to your brother with innocent ears . . . not with preconceptions.

If you will pay attention during this coming week, you will find that a lot of your time when you are involved with others is spent thinking. In fact one of the modes of thinking that you bring into play when you're with another is to interpret what your brother or sister is saying. You see? You listen to what is being said and in your mind you think, "well, based upon her background or based upon his experience, he's likely to be meaning this or that or the other thing." And then you respond not to what they meant but to your interpretation of them.

And so you're having this conversation with yourself and leaving your brother out because you're not present with your brother.

One of the greatest disservices you can bring into play in your relationships is to interpret what another means.

Now there's a benefit to this. If you interpret what they mean based upon your assessment of their background, their upbringing, their life-style and so on, you are not present with them. Not being present with them means you're incapable of loving them. You're not in the space or the frame of mind to actually love one another.

Being present means not using interpretations to distance yourself from your brother or sister - to keep the involvement minimal and therefore less messy. You don't want to get too involved. And so you will come up with an interpretation and then usually your response will be some sort of cliché or thought that talks away what it is you thought they meant.

To love one another means really being present with them. It means listening to them without thinking. It means listening to them so that you might simply grasp what they are simply meaning. And I promise you they are simply meaning something. You might believe that there are complex psychological factors coming into play behind what they're saying and you might think that in order to be truly loving you must discern what the complexities are so that you can bring out the answers that reduce the complexities.

But once again, you're not present with them and they know it. Just like when they do that to you, they aren't present with you and you know it.

You don't need to protect yourself against intimacy by not paying close attention to what your brother is sharing about himself. You don't need that. That just keeps the separation going. That keeps the dissonance of no love going. It's not what you want. And it's not only unnecessary, it's destructive. You understand?

Interpreting what your brother means disconnects you from your brother. It disconnects you from each other. That is not the definition of loving one another.

Oh, I know . . . if you really allow intimacy to occur, things are really going to get messy, because of course – and here's your mindset – your brother is nothing but a collection of psychological habits and concepts themselves and they're unclear. And if you're going to be intimate with them, you're going to be intimate with their lack of clarity, their confusion. And you're likely to get sucked in.

Well, unless you let yourself get into that place where your fear of being sucked in can happen, you won't find yourself experiencing real clarity about your brother . . . clarity that is simple and that allows you to speak to your brother so that your brother recognizes that you understand, that you're not a stranger, that you're not from some other planet or some other foreign mindset. And so you don't have the chance to find defenselessness brought into play by virtue of the innocence with which you're being present with your brother or sister. And so, no healing occurs.

And if you thought that your brother in his confusion was stubborn, you will be further convinced that he is stubborn because he obviously doesn't recognize the value of what you're saying. Of course he doesn't, because again, you're responding to your interpretation rather than being in response to an actual connection with your brother in the simplicity of his Being.

Now all of you are going to have to get past this. You are going to need to pay attention so that you can see that, indeed, you do this. You will be amazed to find out what kind of clarity and simplicity will come forth

from your involvement with others when you abandon indulging in interpreting what they mean.

Be with your brother. And when your brother says something, whether it's pleasant or unpleasant, no matter what it is . . . when your brother says something, remember that you're not there to immediately think of an answer that addresses what you think they said. Let yourself hesitate before you open your mouth and say a word. And remember that unless you are willing to look with innocent eyes or hear with innocent ears, you're not going to have a fair chance of understanding.

You know, sometimes all that's needed is to be understood. Sometimes providing a correction is not what heals. Sometimes innocent non-judgmental presence that can be felt as being genuine is all it takes. It certainly is all it takes in order for a meaningful relationship to grow that isn't weighed down with your great intellectual capacity to reason and interpret. You see?

~excerpt from ACIM Study Group with Raj/Jesus  
Conducted by the Northwest Foundation for ACIM