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- *Tolerance and nonjudgment in personal relationships*
- *The role of suffering*

God joins each of you together as a single unit, as one body.

There were many issues raised this evening and even more responses shared. The sharing was good—it was good because you felt motivated to be open to where you are on your spiritual journeys. The purpose for your being here is not to convince or persuade. The purpose is to give and to receive, to give love to others and to receive our love.

Much of what was shared comes to the very basis which brings you together. How do you respond to life? How do you respond to another? How do you respond to frustrations, anger? How do you respond to the deep regret one feels for the suffering of another? How do you respond to physical pain, emotional pain? What does it mean when you do not measure up to your expectations?

So many issues were raised. It has been a time of considerable focus for each in grappling with these essential issues. There are, of course, no easy answers. The answers take time and continued thought and much prayer. You all are coping with those very issues which provide the motivation for you to meet so regularly.

You didn't come up with too many answers, and that is okay. The answers are not easy to come by. But you should also recognize that an appropriate response, an answer for one, may not be appropriate to another. What is important is that each of you finds a response which feels right. The seeking takes time, but when you have found the answer, you will know it. There is no secret. Because each of you brings a different life to similar issues, the appropriate response must be different. And therefore, the sharing which takes place can never be offered with a sense of persuasion and absolute certainty. It can only be offered with love and with a request for understanding.

The problem of anger is crucial to the lives of all human beings. It is a natural response. There is indeed nothing wrong with expressing one's displeasure at an issue which is felt as being important. You have discussed that it is important to separate the soul from the person. We challenge you to separate the person from the attitude or act. Just as you cannot be judged when you speak with conviction, so too, another cannot be so judged. It is not normal always to speak with one hundred percent conviction. It is more normal to listen and evaluate, to weigh the pros and cons. You are not a judge. You are individuals of many sides. Another is not only not a judge, but also an individual with many sides.

How often you tolerate or co-exist with another on relatively neutral terms. It takes only one strong, negative experience and immediately another is banished from your attention. That simply must not occur. One cannot be banished for being angry. One cannot be banished for speaking one's mind. You must remember that it is

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essential that you relate to others as whole beings, as complete individuals who not only may speak with authority which you disagree with, but who also have doubts and worries and fears and uncertainties. People are people. It is vital for each of you to recognize the truth in that statement. People are complex—your personalities are many-sided. It is difficult, but you must learn to respond to as many sides of an individual as possible. If someone does you ill and is in need, you may recognize what is done, but you must also recognize what is needed. That is responding to more than one side of an individual. It is a difficult challenge, of course, but so essential.

As long as each of you is living a human life, you will have to deal with others. It cannot be any other way. You do not live alone. Sooner or later you come to the point where you are more aware of those multi-sided individuals around you. When you become finally aware of those aspects of personality which are visible or detectable, you will be in a better position to respond to each side.

Marriage, for example, can be looked upon much as the bud of a rose. As the rose grows and is nurtured, it is opened and an entity of great complexity can be seen. For some, a rose consists of the outer petals. For others, they are drawn to the beauty within. In any interpersonal relationship you must become more aware of what is within. You grow through that awareness, and you thereby become more effective in nurturing others because you are aware of what is really needed. You are aware of the whole person and not just what appears at the surface.

You wonder about the life afflicted by great suffering. You see the suffering, but that is only one side. You don't readily see the inner beauty, the inner growth, but you must seek it out. You will never understand the full meaning of suffering, of pain, why an individual must endure. But in the end, that is not important. It is not of value for you to understand why you suffer or another suffers. It is only important to learn what benefit comes as a result of the suffering. When you are close to those in great physical need, do not surround yourself with constant questions of why this person must go through such suffering. Try to be open as to what may be gained as a result of it.

Not all suffering, not all pain is inflicted because of the beneficial results. There is not always a direct cause and effect. Some suffering takes place with no connection to what the benefits may be. It is the individual and those who surround that individual with love who provide meaning or potential out of which great growth may be achieved. It is not that God says, "Someone must grow, so I will make them suffer." But it is God who says, "Through that suffering someone may grow." That is your responsibility: helping in nurturing growth through patience and understanding, through peaceful presence, through the nurturing power of love, being a good listener, being understanding, being supportive. You can provide the environment out of which growth takes place.

You each have much in your life to look forward to, much which is joyous, much which is challenging. Turn to God daily and ask for insight. Ask for peace. Pray for our ability to focus God's power on your souls. Pray for God's healing hand to be laid upon

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all those who need God's comfort. Seek opportunities for learning about others so that you may love others. Look for the many-sided person and don't be satisfied with just the surface. Give love to one another, but provide love for yourself. Respect yourselves as a vital reflection of God. When you respond in life, not as you would perceive God as responding, accept that as part of your humanness. Accept it as part of your growth in human form.

We love you. We surround you with peace if you will take it. We surround you with God's love if you will accept it. We surround you with God's light if you will come out into its brilliance, and we bless you in God's name, now and always.

Amen