

## Holy Week 2024

### Revisiting Atonement

Let's take a little bit of a—can you still smell the residue of the work we did earlier this morning in the room?

Yeah, it's still here.

It's still here.

So, as we get busier, we've got something to come back to.

Today in this morning talk, as we continue to explore these lines of interface between the Gurdjieff work and the classic kind of Christian, mystical, theological presentation of Holy Week, we need to work hard on the difficult topic of atonement theology, which is in almost everybody's face if you come anywhere near Christianity, and see what lines of insight, which I think are really fruitful and life-giving, emerge when we begin to play Gurdjieff's take on the subject out against some of the classic Christian theologies that have supported classic atonement theology.

So as I said yesterday, it's really, in my estimate, impossible to erase atonement theology from the heart of Christianity.

It bears with it this really beautiful and noble sentiment that there was a cost paid, the cost that must be paid for the arising of everything, that there is some cost that remains to be paid.

We are not here on a free ride, nor are we here as a random sort of offshoot of blind mechanical processes like evolution.

While that whole blind mechanical processes that have a real sense of creativity and swing and roll of the dice possibilities, while that is exactly true, there is no micromagic, there is a deep source that comes to us from all the traditions that bound right up and inextricable from the question of meaning and purpose is the acknowledgement that there is a cost to be paid, that this whole thing is a manifestation of a conscious intelligence and will higher than our own.

And that the recognition of this and the price tag with which you buy your sense of purpose in the world and also your access to all of these higher being bodies, they come at the price of understanding that there is a cost that has been paid, that has permitted your arising in the first place, and that you have an obligation to pay back, not out of duty, not out of a grim sort of paying off your indentured servanthood, but because that sense of what happens in you when you wake up and recognize with gratitude that you are part of a dazzling, mysterious manifestation that you didn't have to create or beg for, here you are.



This is what you'll get.

You come and join the work and you'll get a second body and a third body and you'll be on the top of the pack and you get to be on the holy sun absolute.

It's all get, get, get, get, get, get.

So we come back and look at atonement theology as the difficult but necessary inconvenient truth that is the birthplace in which something resembling a mature human heart is birthed.

So of course atonement theology, which I know I've broken the rules of grammar by not defining it first, but I'll get around to it.

I'm just putting it later in the paragraph.

It runs a gamut in Christianity.

And at the most coarse and unrefined end, there's an angry God who demands a human sacrifice to pay for the cost of human beings screwing up.

And unfortunately, incredibly as it seems, this is still the kind of atonement theology that gets dished up across a lot of Christianity.

It's a horrible sort of mingling of an Old Testament God of retribution with a shaming and guilt of the fragilities of humanity.

Jesus died for your sins.

God was pissed so he sent his only son to die on the cross.

Why would I want to have anything to do with that kind of a religion?

And yet people flock to it in droves because it gives them, I believe, a legitimate authorized access route for their own worst impulse, retributive anger.

"In the name of the God, I'm smiting my enemies, exterminating Jews, wiping out Arminians or Palestinians, you name it, because God is pissed."

So that's the darkest side of it.

Most people who live in the sort of mainstream traditions like Presbyterians and Lutherans and people like that get presented with a somewhat gentler model.

God wasn't pissed, he was terribly, terribly sad that human beings screwed up.

And he sent his son in the same way that Abraham consecrated Isaac to the funeral pyre, with a tear in his eye.

A tear for the sadness of humanity, a tear of wishing that it could be otherwise, but nevertheless bring on the matches.

And so sometimes they hasten to tell you, "Okay, but hey folks, it's only for three days and then he'll bounce right back up again."

Because like Isaac all you had to do is to be willing to die and that was all it took.

And so we'll go through this little three-day charade in the tomb and up we go and on about our business, the debt has been paid.

And hey, Jesus took away the debt so you don't have to pay it yourself now.

So that's the kind of weird, confused, you know.

I remember actually one of the most powerful encounters that I ever had was in a spiritual paths conference we did in Santa Barbara one year, several years ago.

And it was always a panel discussion of some of the people you know well, Kabir Helminski, Camille Helminski, Ravi Shapiro, who was our usual rabbi, you know.

Ed Bastian was being our Buddhist.

I got to prance and strut about Christianity.

And well, on this particular occasion, Ravi, our regular rabbi, couldn't make it.

And so they got a rent-a-rabbi from locally.

It was a fellow by the name of Arthur Green Schaefer.

And he was extraordinary.

He was a local temple rabbi in one of the Santa Barbara temples.

And he had recently been to Auschwitz.

He'd been to Germany because he wanted to go and visit each of the concentration camps.

And when he spoke about it later, it was a little bit like Jesus sitting in the harrowing of hell.

He didn't want to get angry and be bad.

He just wanted to understand and absorb how this could happen.

So there was Arthur Schaefer.

And somebody asked a question about Abraham and Isaac, which is almost always set up in atonement theology as the prototype of just as Abraham sacrificed his son on the cross or on the fire in obedience to God, so God in the same sorrow as Abraham sacrifices his son so that all humanity be...

That's the usual pitch saved.

So somebody from the audience asked a question about that.

And I remember that Camille Helminski, bless her heart, this beautiful Sufi convert, Christian, patrician lady, trying to speak in beautiful terms the traditional Islamic Christian atonement take on, "Well, this was necessary and it was really done with love, with love."

You know how it goes.

In the absence of logic, try rhetoric.

And Rabbi Arthur goes, "No."

He says, "This is wrong.

Abraham was wrong."

You could have heard a pin drop in that room.

Three thousand years of Jewish tradition just turned upside down.

He says, "You have the right to sacrifice your own life.

You do not have the right to sacrifice somebody else's life."

I was like, "Whoa.

This man has just cleared up."

Nobody had ever dared to say it, but once it was said it was so patently true.

So yeah, there's a really kind of kinky, twisted, not quite connect.

And when you look at the origins of atonement theology in early Christianity, you'll discover without being a sort of super advanced biblical student, that atonement theology was really the earliest Christology that was placed on Christ.

Following right on the heels of that sort of, "This man was a son of God."

That's the earliest Christology.

But when people try to make sense of it, what they went to was a strange mix of Hebraic, Jewish, Jerusalem temple theology.

And if you read the book of Hebrew, you'll see this funny sort of thing that's almost like being lost in a dream, because Jesus is at the same time two things.

He is the great high priest.

You'll see that all over the book of Hebrews, who offers up the sacrifice which frees us from God.

And he is at the same time the scapegoat.

And it grows out of this wonderful, bizarre scapegoating rituals of the Jewish temple cult, where an animal, chiefly a goat, i.e. a sheep, was elected, saddled symbolically with the burdens of the collective sin and guilt of the human race, and then driven out into the desert, where it would certainly die.

And so the scapegoat became the ritual symbol for something else taking away the collective sins of a people.

And so from the start, the Jewish temple theology, which gave us these earliest theologies, rides the hymns of that ambiguity.

Is Jesus the high priest that makes the sacrifice, or is he the sacrificial offering open?

And you find both of those interpretations woven neck and neck.

But what they have in common is that Jesus is passive.

As a matter of fact, in one of the earliest and most beautiful sequences, early hymns of the church, he's called the victim.

"Victime paschale laudas" goes this wonderful chant.

"Victime paschale laudas, ebola Christianis."

You know, the paschal victim.

And I know you've all heard that.

And when we piously intone, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world," we're thinking of this crazy fusion between the lamb that got offered in the place of Isaac on the funeral pyres of Abraham at the last moment, combined with the scapegoat, vision into the vision.

And this sense that something could be laden with this shame and guilt and sinfulness of a collectivity and die in a way that took it away.

It's the sort of funny, strange but twisted, surrealistic logic of high priestly theology, which is extremely Jewish temple in its roots and does contain one very powerful insight that I don't want to lose sight of.

Because I think it really is the charter in some deep ways of the Christian beautiful illumined understanding of possibility.

That one person's conscious, intentional sacrifice can, in a deep way, relieve the burden of another.

This is possible and this is not in a strong way affirmed across all the sacred traditions.

It's a point of tension in some of them.

I remember my Sufi teacher, we were talking about this, he said, "Every mutton hangs by its own leg."

The idea that people's work on behalf of others can convey a baraka or grace that temporarily shifts their state.

But it is not possible for another human agent to take away the burden of another in such a way that that burden is simply relieved from them.

Boom, gone.

And this, which is the gold or the wheat amidst all the crazy chaff of atonement theology, is an astonishingly bold claim that Christianity makes that I think always bears revisiting.

And it bears revisiting with particular force in holy week.

When we realize, particularly in our own world, not one of us has the power to take away our own sins.

We can't even see them.

We continue to act blindsided out of our worst habits for the whole of our life, and let alone take away another.

How can this be?

And yet Christianity has this really, really profound sense that it does.

And that everything hangs on this.

And not only did this person, Jesus, do it once and for all, but he repeatedly returns to do it in each microsecond that we live because he's part of this atmosphere of mercy that holds and cleanses and protects.

So it's not just something that happened once upon a time forever, but is constantly being replicated out of the Law of Three in our own lives and forces.

So these are profound insights that I think are keepers.

And we have to come back to them and not just sort of throw them away.

But the first thing we need to do is clear the decks and reverse the direction.

The one thing that the classic atonement theologies have really in their operational style, whether you've got hard-edged ones or soft-edged ones, is that Jesus is victim.

He's passive.

He's not the major actor in this.

He is the one that is placed on the cross or on the fire.

There's not much mention that he would intentionally place himself there, although that's hiding in plain sight in the Gospels.

But the sense of the passive action.

And what Gurdjieff gives us, which really allows us to begin to access the classic atonement theology from a whole new perspective, is the whole notion of intentional suffering.



And I think this gives us a profoundly powerful basis for which to begin to revision the whole notion of what was actually happening on the cross and what is it that we're celebrating and tapping into during Holy Week.

So we can start right at the gateway of an intentional suffering and pulling it way, way, way, way back so that we're not at the moment talking about Jesus hanging on the cross, but talking about our own lives as we show up at work weekends and begin to learn the fundamental techniques and practices in this tradition.

Of course, Gurdjieff immediately put his finger on those two of them.

Being Partkdolg Duty.

Conscious duty.

Conscious labor.

And intentional suffering.

And you've worked with them.

If you've worked on the work for more than an hour, you've bumped into them.

So it's probably important to review a little bit what we mean by intentional suffering.

And the chief operative in it is that it's intentional or conscious.

In other words, it's made out of choice.

It is elected, not imposed unwillingly.

That's the most important ingredient.

And of course, if you've read the teachings on it, which you all have, you know the difference between what Gurdjieff used to call "stupid suffering" and what he called "intentional or conscious suffering."

Stupid suffering is the suffering that occurs when you experience pain and retribution that's caused directly by your own, what Thomas Keating would call, your false self programs.

Your agendas, your acting out of your personality, and your identification with those acting out.

And when you have that kind of inner disposition, when you're blind to what you're acting out of, and then immediately get identified with the things that it makes you assert, you are going to suffer.

Boom.

Thomas Keating once said famously that if you're running a power and control program, the only problem is that you're in competition immediately with about three or four million other people in the world, and you are going to bump into them.

So that whole gamut of suffering is, from the point of view of conscious evolution, useless.

I have a very good Buddhist friend who calls it "squeezing the cactus."

"Ahhhh, I have to go for Thanksgiving with my relatives that I can't bear!"

You know, setting yourself up to be a victim.

Either choose to go and go, or choose not to go and don't go.

But don't put yourselves in these intentional situations of self-sabotage and then blame the people that sabotaged you.

You were the one that sabotaged you.

But from the point of view of spiritual evolution, that kind of stupid suffering is redemptively useless.

And so the first part is to learn the difference, and that the major difference between intentional suffering and this kind of path of stupid suffering is that conscious suffering comes from freedom.

You choose the path that you take.

And I don't mean that you choose the circumstances, because you often don't.

Sometimes people say, "Well, how did I choose my cancer then?"

We're not talking about that.

Life throws us into a lot of circumstances which are compulsory.

But within them we always have the freedom of how we're going to respond to them.

And that's the freedom we're talking about that makes conscious choice.

You can have a cancer diagnosis and spend it being pissed with the world and entitled and making everybody else wretched.

You can accept it and you can say, "How can I use this time to grow, to share, to complete?"

You see, it's the same circumstance, but radically different attitudes.

So we're talking about the capacity, first of all, to find where choice actually lies in the matter.

And there is always choice there somewhere, if you can find it.

And then to act out of that, which means that you're acting from a perspective of uncoopted freedom, which allows you to enter the occasion with unconflicted action.

Because when you enter with this push-pull, "Yes, no, I want to be here, but I don't want to be here, there, you know, you know," and you're kind of half decide and half coerce, your actions are going to be unclear.

And they're going to create more trouble.

As Jesus said, "Let your yes be yes and your no be no."

So Gurdjieff always used to say, sort of half-jokingly, that the simplest form of conscious suffering or intentional suffering was to learn to bear somebody else's unpleasant manifestations willingly.

And it's amazing what good work this is.

I think the Benedictine tradition has run successfully on it for 1,500 years.

Because the one thing you can say is that you detest your roommates.

That one snores and that one farts and that one's pompous and that one's got that nasty Midwestern, "And, and I went to the store and I bought three loaves of bread and I, you know."

And you go, "And!"

So you practice doing that.

And little by little what you're doing as you do it is to look at the thing that's pushing your own signals and eliciting this knee-jerk reactive negative response for you and say, "Can I get in a different place with this so that I can be non-reactive and not triggered?"

And of course that means taking responsibility, not for the whole situation.

We're not talking about that, you know, you didn't create your friend's Midwestern accent.

You're not responsible for that.

But you are responsible for saying, "I can't change that.

But I can if I want to take this on as conscious work to see if I can get through a conversation without being triggered enough to grimace every time I hear this."

That's what I mean by taking responsibility.

Yeah, Angel?

I'm listening to you.

Some pieces have just really snapped into place.

You referenced Hebrews and it says that Jesus was made a high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

And putting that with the Rent-a-Rabbi, that maybe that's exactly what that order is.

That it's self-sacrifice, which is in fact intentional suffering.

And that higher body appears in time and place in the same place where Elijah is, who also doesn't know that.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Namaste, Angel.

That's profound.

And you're quite right.

I won't get sidetracked too far by Melchizedek.

But I encourage you to read, if you can look up and find it, old Gnosis magazine, this extraordinary article in about 1993 by Murat Yegan on the priesthood of Melchizedek, which he basically says exists in the higher realms.

It's not an earthly priesthood.

It's a timeless priesthood.

And Melchizedek, he sees as the originator of the entire wisdom tradition.

And so people return again and again, not to this priesthood based on victims and sacrifices and retributed justices, but the priesthood on the altar of Melchizedek, which is the one of conscious choice suffering and free choice in which substitute in love becomes possible, which is exactly what we're talking about with Jesus.

So excellent.

And Bennett differentiates voluntary suffering from intentional suffering beautifully as well.

And he puts the emphasis that intentional suffering has to do with suffering that has its manifestations beyond life, as opposed to the voluntary.

Not voluntary, it's bad.

It's just not the same.

Yeah, yeah.

And we tie that.

Yeah, yeah.

Good.

Good.

You've used the term "substituted love."

Can you say what that is?

We're going to talk about that a little bit.

We'll either get to that this morning or we'll start off with it tomorrow.

But the term comes from...

Charles Williams was the first one to use that, the great [inaudible].

And it has to do with the ability when the intentional suffering is brilliantly settled in a person and can be offered out of freedom and out of a kind of being that can contain this and can make it from that order of Melchizedek, as Angel has reminded us, it does have the capacity to take away the sins, to carry the burden of another so that they're relieved of it.

Williams spent the last ten years of his life exploring this topic deeply.

And some of his most beautiful writing, *All Hallows' Eve* and some of those other sci-fi kind of stories, began a person's suffering.

But he said, fundamentally, it's as simple as taking a neighbor's bag of groceries so that she doesn't have to carry it herself.

And if you keep that really, really simple concrete image in mind, you're in the ballpark.

We're going to flesh in the pieces.

And also one of the things to flag here, although we're not going to get to unpack it fully today, is it's exactly because of this dimension that Mary Magdalene is so crucial to the expression of Holy Week.

And why a lot of my work over the past couple of decades has been to put her back front and center into Holy Week.

Because she holds the thread that connects the whole meaning of the sacrifice, not to the old high priestly theology of victimhood and retributive justice, but to the whole idea that a free choice of exchange offered in kenosis, in the laying down of one's life for another, does have the result of, in some sense, deeply relieving the burden of that person.

And when you understand what's going on in Holy Week from that point of view, it completely reframes it.

So that's exactly where we're going.

We'll see how far we get.

And so those are some of the important things that Gurdjieff's delineation of this intentional dimension of it becomes really, really important for the starting point to reframe.

Because it allows us to work with our efforts at intentional suffering, just as we bump around and crash and bang in our gatherings, to somehow have to come into an alignment with what we're celebrating here.

Not an extraction, not a compulsory execution of an unwilling person by an overpowering God, but the free offering of somebody whose consciousness had reached a place of universal compassion, so much so that this was seen and accepted.

And it's one of the things that we will be playing out and paying attention to as we do Maundy Thursday tomorrow.

Remember, Jesus didn't come to it easily, the text says.

That there was that wrestle in the garden that we theoretically celebrate when everybody takes an hour to stay awake at night and do the watch, where Jesus himself is working with "Father, if it be thy will, let this cup pass from me."

The natural human sacrifice.

And then the "But not my will, but thine be done, O Lord."

What does that mean?

Was that a coercion or was that a deeper seeing and a choice to say yes to that which would have...

So these are mysteries that that day really invites us to ponder.

But we're going to start a little back from that edge of the cliff to just look at conscious suffering or intentional suffering as we know it.

Here's some of the things that I wrote about it in "Eye of the Heart" and my kind of quickie retribution.

This is going down from the bottom of page 54.

"If conscious labor increases our capacity to stay present, intentional suffering radically increases the heartfulness of that presence.

Operating in a slightly different quadrant of the human psyche, but with a parallel strategy of reversing the direction of flow, intentional suffering goes head to head with

that well-habituated pattern," again, one of the contractual givens of World 28 and below, "to move toward pleasure and away from pain.

It invites us to step up to the plate and willingly carry a piece of that universal suffering, which seems to be our common lot as sentient beings in a very dense and dark corner of the universe.

The size of the piece does not matter.

It can be as small, though not easy, as bearing another human being's unpleasant manifestations."

As Gurdjieff was fond of reminding people, "It can be as vast, as greater love has no man than to lay down his life for his neighbor.

What does matter, however, is that the suffering must be intentional, i.e., conscious, clear, and impartial."

He is not talking about the useless and completely avoidable suffering caused by the frustration of our neurotic programs and illusions, what one of my Buddhist friends called "squeezing the cactus."

Gurdjieff himself called it "stupid suffering."

This is simply the laws of Worlds 96 and 192 playing out, and it is of no redemptive value whatsoever to the wider cosmic ecology.

To qualify as upwardly transformative work, the offering must be pure, free of personal gain or self-interest; spacious, non-urgent and attached to outcome; and generous, offered on behalf of the larger whole.

Then it does its work very well.

To my way of looking at it, intentional suffering is a very high practice.

I believe it does not fundamentally belong to World 24, but emanates from a yet higher world, from World 12, where it bears the energy of the Christic or Bodhisattva consciousness, the fully awakened heart, that knows we are all in this together, and that there is in fact no other.

When undertaken rightly, it is always implicitly paschal.

At the upper end, its vibrational field begins to resonate with the energy of World 6, where universal suffering metamorphoses into a causal principle.



Pain is the ground of motion, as Jacob Boehme bluntly put it, and the suffering of the created order meet their uncreated prototype in the suffering of God.

And do not think that this is just sentimental suffering over the misery we humans inflict on ourselves and on one another through the misuse of our freedom.

It is that, but it is far more than that.

It is in the end a kind of primordial cosmic constant, the necessary cost of the impessure of nothing into something, which is born directly in the marrow of the divine heart, as World 1 allows itself to be drawn and quartered so that all other worlds may come into being.

Gurdjieff would speak of this obligation elusively from time to time, most openly in his fourth Obligionian Striving, where he averred that our real human task was to pay as quickly as possible for one's arising in individuality, in order afterward to be free to lighten as much as possible the sorrow of our Common Father.

So that's where we're going, that even as you bear the unpleasant manifestations of another, remember that in so doing you're basically aligning with something in World Twelve where the passion plays out and is reclaimed, which in fact points to these cosmogonic sufferings at the heart of God.

So in paying a very simple cost we are also coming into sympathetic vibration with what I want to talk about on Good Friday as we return to the cosmos.

Who really is responsible for this cosmic constant of suffering, of the cost to be paid?

Where does that cost originate?

We're working our way to that and we'll come back to that on Friday.

Good Friday seems like a good time to do it.

So today Matt has pushed us into the question right well that intentional suffering as Gurdjieff explores it and develops it is beautifully connected to what Williams for the first time called "substituted love."

It's a new way of framing the whole outcome.

Yes, in the end an innocent person does die, but not as a victim of retributive justice, but as a free act of laying down oneself or of carrying another's burden so that the whole may somehow be relieved.

And it begins in gratitude and wonder.

One of my favorite lines from Williams is "We may not yet be able to live for others, but we undisputedly live from others."

And this is true both sort of in our horizontal relationships nowadays.

I mean you would be sitting here in a chilly house if the folks from Colby and Gale hadn't delivered the new load of heating oil on.

People support us.

You flush the toilet and it doesn't flush fast enough and you get pissed, but think of all the structures that are supporting our basic offers.

And it's true linearly.

We got here through our parents and whatever rotters they may be and whatever burdens they saddled us with, we got here through them and they through theirs.

There is a bloodline chain that leads to our... And Gurdjieff always insisted that today's fashion of being irredeemably pissed at your parents is an end to your development.

You can't go beyond it.

And whoever's fault it is, it's a fundamental prerequisite of what Williams called the co-inherence.

The idea that all the worlds are in the other worlds and feeding the other worlds.

That one must respect and honor in an impartial way, bear gratitude for one's parents.

And for most of us, particularly growing up in the I-oriented and somewhat entitled age, that's hard work.

Because we've been taught to identify our parents as the chief culprits in all our own automatic behavior, which is true.

And the wounds are real.

Probably not quite as true as we think because we are watching them through the eyes of victims ourselves.

But it's true nonetheless.

That's for me the real meaning of original sin.

It's not that people come to the world stained because their parents had sex to get them.

In which case, people born in vitro would be free of original sin.

I don't think the Catholic Church has tackled that yet.

But it's that the blindness, the reactivity, the postures of life, the classic kind of Enneagram of personality poses are instilled in us reactively by defending ourselves against the blood aggression we experience from our parents.

And then we pass those on to others, creating the same wreckage into the next generation.

That's original sin.

That's how sin gets transmitted generation to generation.

But the practice of reversing this has to do beginning with impartial gratitude and respect.

That a parent is a post and the post must be honored.

And yeah, you have all the time in the world to work your way to grudgingly admit that, but that's the bottom line if you're going to get free of your ego self in its reactivity.

And Gurdjieff taught that.

That's the beginning of the capacity to begin to work impartially and pay it forward and look at all things, even hurtful things, with gratitude and wonder.

And these are some of the qualities of being that are called forth in this whole sort of filter of intentional suffering that allows us more and more to experience our participation, that we live in, from, and toward the entire co-inherence.

In gratitude for that and those who have allowed our arising to happen in the first place, in awareness of the ones that are supporting it at every moment, and of course that extends to sentient life, the biosphere and the geosphere as well, and in a deep sense of paying it forward into the new generation.

George Bennett, who is John G.'s son, and a beautiful, beautiful gentle philosopher in his own right, who teaches fifth and sixth grade in a school sort of up in northwest Massachusetts, says that intentional suffering always bears within it the seeds of the future.

Because the way we suffer intentionally, the way we take something on ourselves now, is to create a space so that a future can happen.

And he says it's not surprising that so many... Beelzebub's tales are written to the grandson and the first realization and articulation of being-duty is placed in the mouth of this ten-year-old child, Hasein, in chapter seven.

George says that's intentional because intentional suffering implies a trust in and a commitment to the future, to the whole co-inherence.

And it's that, that sense of a broader version that allows us to stand up and offer, offer against those screaming instincts for self-preservation that otherwise dominate and liberate or imprison the human being, that make us mechanical.

It's that that allows us to step forward and make this impossible thing, to offer one's life, even one's very life, you know, to surrender back this conscious pixel of consciousness that you are, in order, in some sense that you don't even know, to help the whole.

And we experience this most profoundly, most of us in our lives.

We don't get to that sort of impartial altruism easily.

We express it first of all with our beloveds and second with our children.

And depending on what kinds of relationships in life you have, either one of them could be more... Most of us who have kids, particularly if they're little kids, would willingly, unthinkingly exchange places with our child if our child was in trouble.

You know, your kid falls off a dock into the freezing water in Maine and the first thing you do is dive in after him.

You don't even think, you don't even think, "Hey, wait, you know, he may grow up to be a bastard and I'm a good person, I should maybe not do this."

You know, it's true, but you don't stop to think there.

Why not?

Why not?

It's instantaneous.

And you could say, "It's instinct and it is."

But sometimes our instincts give us a head start towards higher evolution, don't just imprison us.

And it's a very good work to take those positive instincts that we have that lead in the direction of altruism, make it conscious choice.

The other place where we encounter this is in romantic love.

And when you connect hard with the beloved, whether it's in the throes of early infatuation or whether it's through a life of faithful service to one another so that you gradually polish each other down like immortal diamonds, whichever way it forms up, there's not too many who have truly touched love who would not instantaneously exchange places with their beloved.

I'm sure, Rosie, that if John's life depended on your offering your own heart, you would give it in an instant because you know that's what love does and John would do the same.

That's what happens.

And there's a beautiful line by Ladislaus Boros in his *Mystery of Death* book where he says that love and death have a common root.

He says, "It's no surprise that the best love stories all end in death."

But this is not because love is the triumph over death.

He says it's because love is itself death.

It is the only place where the complete self-offering, which is the consummation of love, takes place.

He says, "This is why lovers go to their deaths so freely and unconcernedly, because they know they're not entering death but enter the most intimate chamber of love."

It's a beautiful quote.

Love is ultimately the triumph over death, but it's not because it conquers death, but because it is itself.

So it's that love is the perfection of kenosis.

Do you understand what I mean by that?

That the highest expression of love is the complete giving of oneself even to one's life for another.

And when you take that and understand that where kenosis, the complete self-giving which is the perfection of love, crosses the line of exchange, which we've talked about is the nature of the mercy, everything is exchanging with everything, then yes, in that kind of context it becomes not only possible but blessedly salvific that one can, out of total freedom and consummation of love, lay down one's life for another.

And the conditions of the planet thereby change.

Does that make sense to you?

And when you begin to put that filter on Holy Week and just magnify it up to the tenth degree, take your own blessed beloved, your most precious person, the one one that you would exchange your life for, and then blow that up and come back to the quote, "For God so loved the world."

Can you love so much, so impartially, that you could lay down your life for the world, for a greater whole than you could see?

For your children and grandchildren, maybe yes.

For the American justice system, maybe yes.

For planetary order, for a future that gets to live in the human race, maybe yes.

And I think it's these things that Holy Week really causes us and inspires us to think about as we sit on this certainly cusp point.

Starting from the intentional suffering that we know we can do, bearing the unpleasant manifestations of another, right on up to the death of the cross, revisioned as an absolute love, reaching its absolute consummation in death, changing the conditions of the planet.

Anyway, we will stop there except I will add one more time, without having to beat this to death right now, can you see now why Mary Magdalene is so essential to the celebration of Holy Week?

And what we're going to see is that in the classic biblical vision of the drama, the whole agony, Jesus' ordeal on the cross, his death there, is bookended by Mary Magdalene and anointing.

It's she who sends him forth the evening before to be anointed and sealed as one going to his death, to the intimate bridal chamber of love, as Boros says.

And it's she who is there to await him on Easter morning, again with the oils that she had intended to anoint his body as they took him from the corpse.

Anointing in love, "place me as a seal upon your heart," as the Song of Songs says it, becomes the tenor, becomes the Do on which the whole drama of the Paschal Mystery, the sacrifice, the dying, and the resurrection plays out.

And when you see it that way, it kind of totally revolutionizes your approach to this whole thing.

So that's enough for now.

Yeah, Joan?

I just wanted to make a comment about Jesus, about intentional suffering.

In his planetary body, from his two parents, at the Annunciation, there was choice.

"How can this be?"

she said.

Then the pause, and then "may it be to me according to your word," Joseph, the same thing, "who thought about putting her away quietly," it says.

And then he says, "yes."

And so that physical DNA and the reverberation of that DNA, of that choice, is in the planetary body of Jesus.

So there is something already vibrating there.

And we don't know about how much he knew the story of his parents, and the kenosis that had to happen in both Joseph and Mary when Jesus is launched to make his own choices.

But there's something seeded in there, in his planetary body, in the DNA.

That's another really beautiful insight.

And I think since we've traveled all this way to be here, that it's probably worth calling this insight out for a minute.

What I started right out with when I heard that, when you were speaking, there's a beautiful line in Meister Eckhart, where he's in one of his sermons, he's pondering Jesus on the cross.

And he says, "And yes, his soul was torn to sorrow as a human heart would be, and his great spirit accepted."

And all of a sudden I thought, "Holy shit!

Meister Eckhart's talking about pouring from second body into first."

And as you experienced, Joan, when you were sick, that you could draw on second body and that greater cosmic place where you're right, where these things are out there.

They're in the imaginal world.

They're all there for us to draw on, if we can access them through our second body.

And you can draw the currents that allow these impossible things to happen.

You're quite right that, playing out according to any scenario, Joseph would have gotten rid of Mary as fast as he could.

Caught in the act, obviously.

But somehow, the sense that even Jesus could have been living in his first body that was reaching its end, drawing into his second body and beyond the higher, to find in there the cosmic strength, the ray of force and energy that would allow this to be born in this world so that it could be our fruit in this world as a changed condition of possibility.

It's a brilliant possibility.