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Zion and the Spirit of At-one-ment

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Summary:

Catherine Thomas emphasizes that a condition of peace is necessary in order for us to experience the companionship of the Spirit. We are prone to experience troubled relationships, but we can by our own volition elect to develop a satisfying sense of at-one-ment with our associates. The Book of Mormon describes dysfunctional families, including Lehi's. Nephi explains in his psalm (2 Nephi 4) that how we are judged will not be based on what others do to us, but on how we react to them.

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ZION AND THE SPIRIT OF THE AT-ONE-MENT

And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people. And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God. . . . They were in one, the children of Christ and heirs to the kingdom of God. And how blessed were they! (4 Nephi 1:15-17)

How do we get to the heavenly, Zion condition described in 4 Nephi? How do we learn how to live the spirit of the at-one-ment? How do we bridge the gap between where we may perceive ourselves to be now and where we want to be spiritually? Will the Lord do something magical to us to make us ready for his coming, to make us ready to build Zion, to enter at last into the Kingdom of God? How do we get there from here?

I suggest that we have come to earth to learn the principles of peace and at-one-ment and to take them with us into the kingdom. We knew them in the premortal world, but we may have forgotten how they work here. Is it possible, in fact, that our very possession of these principles is the *evidence* of our preparation to live in the Kingdom? When we think how easily we may have traded the spirit of at-one-ment for disturbance, we see what a challenge it might be for us to live in a Zion or heavenly condition where everyone will have learned, by desire and practice, to prefer the spirit of at-one-ment with each other to conflict or disturbance.

What is the nature of the negative energy that leads to conflict around us? It is unrest caused perhaps by trying to impose one's own will on others, or by criticism, anger, irritability, selfishness, failure to forgive, failure to revere another's agency, retaliation, moodiness, fear, worry, or simply forgetting to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. All of these we have probably all experimented with to learn bitter and sweet. These are ways we all act until we learn that there is something better and the better way is connected with the divine nature that we came to earth to acquire.

Of course, we all feel negative emotions, and sometimes they need to be expressed. But even when these negative-energy emotions are fully justified, they can constitute a spiritual burden for ourselves and those around us if they are indulged in too long. Our bad temper and bad moods can become a form of abuse for us and those around us.

Perhaps we have not fully processed the idea that peace is a vital state for the Spirit to flourish in. We may not have realized the spiritual value of inner peace. The Lord, however, values it very highly and often invites us to live in peace (Mosiah 4:13). Mormon speaks to the *peaceable* followers of Christ who have entered into *the rest of the Lord*, whom he recognizes because of their *peaceable* walk with men (Moroni 7:3-4). Maybe peace has seemed like

something that just happens if we're lucky, or it seems like a luxury that we can live without.

But learning to establish real inner peace is indispensable to spiritual progress. The scriptures also call this peace, *rest in the Lord*, or *God's rest*. This rest or peace is a gift of *sweet feeling* as well as *insight* from the Lord and cannot be accomplished by just positive thinking alone or by denial of negative feeling. It is a spiritual state initiated by us and follows spiritual principles. For example the Lord says, "Teach them to never be weary of good works, but to be meek and lowly in heart; for such shall find rest to their souls" (Alma 37:34).

Thus, as I have watched myself and others, it is sobering how readily we trade inner peace for something less, for some sort of upset. How readily we take offense and then escalate the disturbance around us. How easily we have unsatisfied expectations of how others should treat us or what they should be doing for us--and we grow cold or irritable to retaliate for this real or imagined slight. How eagerly we may insist on being right at the expense of precious relationships. Thus keeping the water rippling around us with negative energy, we are often not still and at rest in the principles of tolerance and love, of overlooking, of letting go, of forgiving.

I find that when I am not at peace inside, I make trouble around me. I even look for trouble, picking at this, complaining at that, practicing abuse. I may yield to self pity which causes me to withdraw, licking my wounds, waiting for someone to fix what is really my responsibility to fix inside myself. I think self pity may be a sin because it functions to violate the spirit of at-one-ment and the power of faith. I have asked myself, how long could I last in Zion? How long would it be before I singlehandedly dismantled Zion?

Maybe I have thought that at the last judgment someone would wave a magic priesthood wand over me and I would suddenly acquire a heavenly personality. But it's clear to me now that the Lord expects me to practice here and to involve him in these kinds of personal challenges until the heavenly personality becomes mine.

A Zion society is the product of the personal choice of every person in it and; yes, it is also a function of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that shapes hearts to be like his great heart, but first it begins with an individual choice, and must become independent of other's choices for something less.

The Spirit of the Lord is the Spirit of at-one-ment. It flows from the Lord Jesus Christ and seeks to draw us to him and to each other; he invites us to synchronize our personal energies with his in all our relationships (Moroni 7:4). As we synchronize our energies, we feel at peace with ourselves, with the Lord, and with each other.

You know that you and I have the divine power to generate positive energy: mentally, physically, and spiritually by carefully choosing attitudes, actions, and words according to the

teachings of the scriptures. I have come to know that in any moment what I send out is my choice, and I can't blame it on a situation or on another person. That personal responsibility is made very clear repeatedly in the Book of Mormon:

And now remember, remember, my brethren, that whosoever perisheth, perisheth unto himself and whosoever doeth iniquity doeth it unto himself; for behold, ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves; for behold, God hath given unto you a knowledge and he hath made you free. He hath given unto you that ye might know good from evil, and he hath given unto you that ye might choose life or death; and ye can do good and *be restored* unto that which is good, or have that which is good restored unto you; or ye can do evil, and have that which is evil restored unto you. (Hel 14:30-31).

When we do choose to generate positive, spiritual energy, the Spirit of the Lord is attracted to our positive energy, connects with it, and magnifies its power for good. Thus, we learn to work as the Savior works and to become as he is, even as we walk this life.

This divine power of at-one-ment seeks to work miracles in relationships, to make good relationships eternal, to make poor relationships better, and to pull us together in sweet resonating relationships. But there are some basic things we apparently have to understand first.

We may indeed have many misconceptions about how to be happy and how to establish relationships of at-one-ment with others. We may think that these relationships have to meet our own concept of ideal; we may think that people have to feel and think the way we do in order to be happy or that we have to think as they do in order to have the spirit of at-one-ment between us. We may feel that many of the people around us do not value what we do, do not meet our hopes and dreams, and we may despair that we will ever experience at-one-ment with some of the people God has put into our lives.

But all the people are in our lives are there for important reasons. *Seldom are they given to us to satisfy us.* Rather, usually unwittingly, they are our teachers. We don't need ideal relationships to be happy; we can live happily with less than ideal because each relationship can be enriched with the spirit of the at-one-ment which greatly improves the quality of our personal emotional lives.

All of us have experienced or are now experiencing troubled relationships. But I know from my own experience that miracles very often happen in relationships.

I grew up in what the psychological world would call a dysfunctional family; each of the people in that family was and is a good person. They were good people with very little understanding then of how to be happy.

In my experience in a troubled family I learned to:

--try to control others

- be critical in order to try feel more secure in my own self-righteousness
- require satisfaction from others' behavior (I wanted certain responses from people and if I didn't get them I was unhappy or angry)
- use anger as manipulation
- be very self assertive, to try to prove myself in every situation
- make trouble by letting people know the various ways in which they were not meeting my expectations, etc.
- get even with irritability, cold silences, or not-so subtle barbed words
- nag people and try to talk them into things; these people came to feel like my enemies

Results: I experienced a lot of unfocused fear, tendencies to depression, guilt, feelings of the meaninglessness of life.

I didn't know that there was really anything wrong with me, but I didn't feel good. I didn't know how good I could feel. It was like not knowing that there was a true church, then hearing that there was, then actually having a testimony and knowing. But when I began to taste the Spirit and I could feel the effects it was having on my emotions, how they were clearing up, how life was smoothing out, how sweet some moments in life were starting to be. I wanted more and more; I think much of life is trying to find the formula for those moments, to bottle it and uncap it. We try a lot of unproductive things. Here is one of the main points I want to make about establishing Zion: I did not see a relationship between the way I treated other people and the way I felt inside: I thought that what *they were doing made me unhappy*, but it was how *I was reacting* and what *I was doing* that made me unhappy.

Much of the emotional pain we have doesn't come from the love we weren't given in the past, but from the love we ourselves aren't giving in the present

Nevertheless, here is the reality of telestial living--nearly every day someone will do to us one or more of the following: belittle, be insensitive to needs, will show indifference, make us feel insecure, humiliate, frighten, abuse, inconvenience, demand, criticize, disappoint, lie, hurt, betray, try to seduce, misunderstand, resent, threaten, attack (verbally or physically).

So what shall we do about all that? What we do is very important. Maybe the purpose for such experiences can be answered with this question: How are we ever going to learn Christ-like love unless we have a chance to practice in the face of the opposites? Every disrupted relationship, whether in our own homes or out in the marketplace, is a chance to forge the divine nature in ourselves and prepare for that endless state of happiness.

Joseph Smith's life reflects the principles of relationships in connection with the spirit of revelation (quoting David Whitmer):

At times when Brother Joseph would attempt to translate. . . he found he was spiritually blind and could not translate. He told us that his mind dwelt too much on earthly things, and various causes would make him incapable of proceeding with the translation. When in this condition he would go out and pray and when he became sufficiently humble before God, he could then proceed with the translation" (*Address to All Believers*, 30).

He [Joseph Smith] was a religious and straightforward man. . . He had to trust in God. He could not translate unless he was humble and possessed the right feelings towards everyone. To illustrate so you can see: One morning when he was getting ready to continue the translation, something went wrong about the house and he was put out about it. Something that Emma, his wife, had done. Oliver and I went upstairs and Joseph came up soon after to continue the translation but he could not do anything. He could not translate a single syllable. He went downstairs, out into the orchards, and made supplication to the Lord; was gone about an hour--came back to the house, and asked Emma's forgiveness and then came upstairs where we were and then the translation went on all right. He could do nothing save he was humble and faithful (B.H. Roberts, *CH* 1:131).

Providentially for us, the Book of Mormon describes some dysfunctional families and troubled relationships: Nephi, for example, who lived with very abusive brothers and experienced many abuses, received verbal and physical abuse from those who should have been his protectors and nurturers. How very relevant his experience is to so many who suffer abuse today. It appears that on several occasions he was able to forgive them frankly (1 Ne 7:21)

But in 2 Ne 4, he faces the debilitating effects of his brothers' behavior on himself. He is angry, only he has turned his anger inward--a very common source of depression. He sees that, although his anger is 100% justified, nevertheless, for his own spiritual wellbeing he must let it go and turn to the Lord!

Why should my heart weep and my soul linger in the valley of sorrow, and my flesh waste away, and my strength slacken, because of mine afflictions? And why should I yield to sin, because of my flesh? . . . Why am I angry because of my enemy? Awake my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul. Do not anger again. . . do not slacken my strength. . . Rejoice O my heart, and cry unto the Lord. . . . Wilt thou make *me* that I may shake at the appearance of sin? (2 Ne 4:26-30).

He teaches this powerful principle: we are not judged for what others do to us; we are judged by how we react to what they do to us, based on what we understand at the time. Our happiness is based on what we do now, not so much on what was done to us.

We're not talking here about submitting to serious abuse. Forgiving people, acting kindly toward them, doesn't necessarily mean letting them abuse us. Sometimes relationships have to be severed to keep one of the parties from being destroyed. In Nephi's case, the Lord finally took him out of Laman and Lemuel's presence (2 Ne 5). But Nephi waited on the Lord, teaching us that revelation is absolutely indispensable to relationship work. When we are in relationship

trouble, we need to draw very close to the Lord and counsel with him the best we can (Alma 37:37).

Even if we do not think of ourselves as spiritually adept, the Book of Mormon teaches over and over again that if we will come to him in humility, he can take even our worst messes, even the ones we ourselves have made, and make them work to our benefit and healing. Alma to his son Shiblon:

And now my son . . . I would that ye should remember, that as much as ye shall put your trust in God even so much ye shall be delivered out of your trials, and your troubles, and your afflictions, and ye shall be lifted up at the last day.

One additional idea: What we cannot know nor remember, until the Lord reveals it, is what we covenanted to do in the premortal world with respect to a particular relationship here. In some cases the Lord will take us out of a relationship, or counsel us to take ourselves out, but very often he will set about to work a small series of miracles in the relationship so that the spirit of at-one-ment can flourish in us and with us, as it does in heaven. He is trying to teach us to live in a celestial society and to master the principles that govern such a society; therefore, it seems that usually he wants us to mend rather than sever relationships. But each experience has its learnings and when we depend on him, cleave to him, he will lead all who are willing out of the mess, the wiser for having been through it.

The word at-one-ment: literally to bring estranged or alienated people into reconciliation. The major concept underlying the Gospel is the at-one-ment, re-at-one-ment. The word *at-one-ment* translates a Greek word which means *re-conciliation* after estrangement. (See Nibley for fuller discussion, *Approaching Zion*, 556f). The image of the atonement is the being encircled in or by something, e.g. being encircled in the arms of the Lord; the idea of embrace is inseparably tied to the temple and to heaven, places of at-one-ment.

Many Book of Mormon passages speak of being embraced or encircled in the arms of the Lord:

--2 Ne 1:15 The Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally *in the arms of his love*"

--Alma 5:33 Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men for the *arms of mercy* are extended towards them, and he saith: Repent, and I will receive you."

[Other examples of *arms of mercy* can be multiplied many times in scriptures: Alma 26:15, Alma 34:16, Mormon 5:11, 2 Ne 4:33, D&C 6:20]

At-one-ment is clearly another word for *sealing*; there is no ultimate embrace without obedience to temple ordinances of sealing, of endowment, of temple marriage (Adam says: "This I know now is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman because she

was taken out of man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall *cleave* unto his wife; and they shall be *one flesh* [Moses 3:23-24]).

The Holy of Holies in the temple is called in Hebrew the *bet ha-kapporet*, the house or room of the at-one-ment, or the house or room of the embrace, the place where the presence of God is.

The concept of *at-one-ment* permeates the scriptures: (*"If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me"*-- John 12:32; 3 Ne 27:14-15). The word means to bring alienated, miserable, fallen beings back into harmony and resonance with each other and with the Lord Jesus Christ.

At-one-ment is possible here and now. In fact,
Things must be done on earth as they are done in heaven so that that which is earthly may be made heavenly. That which does not try to be heavenly must remain telestial or terrestrial and cannot be made heavenly or celestial. The Savior connects with our trying.

At-one-ment is the condition in which heavenly beings live; if we want to live there with them, we have to *practice* here and now the manner of emotional and spiritual life that they live, and that they teach us to live. *This life* is the time for men to prepare to meet God (Alma 34:32). So we want to think through how to live the spirit of at-one-ment and bring it to pass in whatever way we can on the earth

I have committed the keys of my kingdom and a dispensation of the gospel for the last times: and for the fulness of time, in the which *I will gather together in one all things*, both which are in *heaven*, and which are on *earth*. (D&C 27:13). (Things = people)

In this dispensation the Lord has said,

But behold, they [the saints] have not learned to be obedient to the things which I required at their hands, . . .and do not impart of their substance, as becometh saints, to the poor and afflicted among them; and are not *united* according to the *union* required by the law of the celestial kingdom. *And Zion cannot be built up unless it is by the principles of the law of the celestial kingdom"* (D&C 105:3)

Examples of at-one-ment work in the Church:

Missionary work, visit/home teaching, Family temple work, sealings, marriage, etc.

Scripture words for at-one-ment: oneness, in one, unity, united order, gathering, equal, cleave, seal, welding link, embrace, resurrection.

--What is the temple endowment itself but a progressive sealing of ourselves to the Lord until we are clasped in the arms of Jesus (Mormon 5:11)

--In the temple: the effectiveness of special prayer is absolutely facilitated by *feelings* of love

At-one-ment work is temporal, emotional, and spiritual

As we grow spiritually, our feeling about life is influenced by how we act and even feel toward others. That is, we truly reap what we send out: "For that which ye do send out shall return unto *you* again, and be restored" (Alma 41:15; emphasis added) [boomerang effect]. If we don't like what we're getting in a particular relationship, we may have to check out what we're sending into that relationship.

Thoughts and feelings have energy and travel from their origin to affect people and things; but mostly they affect the person with whom they originated. Thoughts are probably a rudimentary form of the power of creation which you and I will have in the hereafter.

What happens *to* us enters our systems as energy and takes effect through our energy systems, but *what we send out* in response seems to have a much more powerful effect on us. Matthew 15:18--quote

--Example: someone trespasses against me. I feel this negative ripple through my system. I face the moment of decision: shall I neutralize this assault on me and return love, or shall I let the assault pass out of me in intensified, negative waves to my brother, making a poor situation worse?

My happiness, my possession of the Lord's Spirit, depends on what I decide among many options to do. The Lord reports:

My disciples, in days of old, sought occasion against one another and forgave not one another in their hearts; and for this evil they were afflicted and sorely chastened [by the law of restoration]. Wherefore, I say unto you that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; *for there remaineth in him the greater sin*. I the Lord will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men. (D&C 64:8-10)

The Lord has forbidden getting even, paying back, taking vengeance--in any form. He requires us to try to act continually in a forgiving mode, being kind to those who, by our way of thinking, don't deserve even a pleasant word from us.

The Lord does not mean that we do not take legal steps where necessary (D&C 64:9-13). When behavior endangers membership in the Church or breaks civil law, the offending one must come to justice for his good and for the good of the people around him.

But this giving love where no love is deserved is one meaning in the scriptures of *grace for grace and is a significant key to living the Spirit of the at-one-ment*.

Hel 12:24: And my God grant, in his great fulness, that men might be brought unto repentance and good works, that they might be restored unto *grace for grace*, according to their works.

D&C 93:12-13, 20 And I John, saw that he received not of the fulness at the first, but received *grace for grace*; and he received not of the fulness at first, but continued from *grace to grace*, until he received a fulness. . . . For if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father; therefore, I say

unto you, you shall receive *grace for grace*.

That is, the Father gave Jesus grace for the grace that Jesus gave others; Christ gives us grace (divine power and blessings) for the grace ("earned" and "unearned" kindnesses) we give others. So if we are going to go where he is, we must make a habit of giving lots of grace especially to those who don't deserve it. We can say in our hearts upon being treated unkindly, "I'm just going to give that person grace"(See 3 Ne 12:44)--law of loving one's enemies.

You see how the Law of Restoration is really a form of the law of grace for grace.

For example, by way of application, what would happen if we dropped all charges against those around us? If for their sake we happily sacrificed all bitter satisfaction, all retribution, all demand for repayment, all vengeance--we let all this go, without regret or second thoughts?(Terry Warner, *Bonds of Anguish, Bonds of Love*) This kind of behavior, living in the at-one-ing, forgiving mode, is a real kindness to ourselves.

What are the effects on myself of generating positive energy?

1. It is possible to make the Law of Restoration work *for me* (Alma 41:10-15); give it nothing to use against me. But thank goodness for repentance when we forget. See Hel 14:30-31

2. Confidence in the Lord swells (121:45) because the Lord gives me grace for giving others grace--I can pray with more faith

3. Gain a sense of righteous dominion over my environment with my love and faith and Spirit.

Joseph Smith with respect to oneness:

"It is by union of feeling that we obtain power with God. . . . Nothing is so much calculated to lead people to forsake sin as to take them by the hand and watch over them with tenderness. When persons manifest the least kindness and love to me, O what power it has over my mind, while the opposite course has a tendency to harrow up all the harsh feelings and depress the human mind. . . It is the doctrine of the devil to retard the human mind and retard our progress by filling us with self righteousness--The nearer we get to our heavenly Father the more are we disposed to look with compassion on perishing souls, to take them upon our shoulders and cast their sins behind our back. If you would have God have mercy on you, have mercy on one another" (WJS,123).

In any encounter with any person, I can generate the spirit of the at-one-ment, through listening to him or her with empathy, through encouragement, through feeling for Spirit of the Lord. I *can* influence the atmosphere I live in. Then, what he does is his responsibility, not mine. We often connect in the wrong ways because we feel responsible for each other choices. But we're not.

Maybe it is our guilt or our fear that makes us take too much responsibility for others. We feel that we are in some way responsible, because we unconsciously or consciously know that we have indeed made mistakes, maybe very serious ones. Remember Alma and the four sons of Mosiah trying to go about making restitution. They had led some people into some bad stuff, but when they wanted to undo the damage, they found that the people didn't want to change. Nevertheless, they got on with their lives, and we find Ammon brim with joy in Alma 26. He made the restitution he could, then the Lord forgave him, because the Lord knows and has so designed it that each person has his own Savior and his own potential connection with the Lord and whatever he has done, no one made him do, but he chose to do; each is finally responsible for what he does--even those who are led by another into something wrong.

One who wishes to enter into at-one-ment first learns a special *detachment* from others. This detachment produces inner serenity which is based on understanding this following truth:

I am not responsible for what any other human being chooses to do. God only holds me responsible for what I do, not what my children, or my husband, or my neighbor does--because whatever they do they chose to do and God will present the helps they need to undo their mistakes. I am liberated by this truth. I can stand independent in the sphere in which I was created, to act and not to be acted upon (D&C 93:30, 2 Ne 2:14, 26-27).

In what way are we dependent and in what way are we independent? Am I my brother's keeper? How can we process this truth that there is by and large no righteous way that we can make another person change?>

Many of our greatest confusions exist over how to interpret the Lord's laws of love. What is our responsibility and what is not? There is an option between withdrawing from people to protect ourselves and trying to do too much for or to them and becoming enemies (both are inimical relationships): it is the principle of being, of fragrance, of faith, of insight, of patience: It offers, but it doesn't overbear (Alma 38:12)

President Hunter gives the model:

God's chief way of acting is by persuasion and patience and long-suffering, not by coercion and stark confrontation. He acts by gentle solicitation and by sweet enticement. He always acts with unfailing respect for the freedom and independence that we possess. He wants to help us and pleads for the chance to assist us, but he will not do so in violation of our agency. . . . To countermand and ultimately forbid our choices was Satan's way, not God's, and the Father of us all simply never will do that. He will, however, stand by us forever to help us see the right path, find the right choice, respond to the true voice, and feel the influence of his undeniable Spirit. His gentle, peaceful, powerful persuasion to do right and find joy will be with us "so long as time shall last, or the earth shall stand, or there shall be one man upon the face thereof to be saved"

(Moro.7:36). (*Ensign*, Aug 1994, back page.)

What if positive energy is more like perfume than emotional overdrive?

Would it be an overstatement to say that during our waking hours we are either generating negative energy or positive energy?

If we absolutely knew that the Lord would send his Spirit any time that we began to generate positive feeling with thoughts, words, actions, why would we ever choose to generate something else?

Trying to get right inside may begin as a feeling of going through motions, of acting in ways that you'd like to feel but don't quite yet; then if righteousness is really what one wants; if to be captained by and consumed in Christ is really the heart's desire, the Lord will give one the insight and feeling that go with one's attempts to do his will. One's independence is dependent on one's connection with the Lord Jesus Christ. Then come the moments of perfectness and peace.

God works through positive feelings which we have the agency and power to generate and multiply. His presence and Spirit are attracted to the positive energy that we generate. They are repelled by the opposites.

--But God can't practice it for us. He says:

Strengthen your brethren in all your conversation, in all your prayers, in all your exhortations, and in all your doings (D&C 18:7; emphasis added)

When we live in patience and love with each other, in peace, meshing with those around us, not resisting them, but supporting, forgiving each other, speaking the words that evoke the Spirit, encouraging the positive that is in every person we know--no matter what his weaknesses, we live the spirit of at-one-ment with each other. The more we make each relationship sweeter and more tender and dear, the more we live at-one-ment. The more we lay down pride and old checklists of hurts and grievances, the more we send out healing, the more our relationships heal.

We have to practice at-one-ment so that we will know how to act should we make it into heaven.

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