

Objectless Love

The Direct Path starts with an investigation into our true nature – in Sanskrit terms this is referred to as the path of *Jnana*. But unlike traditional *Jnana* paths, in the Direct Path we go directly to the reality of our experience, or at least, as directly as we are able to go, through the method of *atma vichara*, self-enquiry. There is no long period of purification that is required, and ‘preliminary truths’ or ‘lesser truths’ are kept to just what is needed in an individual case. We use the intellect to rigorously examine our experience in the absence of all spiritual beliefs and preconceived ideas and thereby allow the mind to take us beyond the mind. It’s the ultimate science, taking us beyond the boundaries of science.

But as the Shankaracharya explained and Rupert also recognises, some people in whom emotion is predominant rather than intellect, naturally feel drawn to what is known as the path of devotion, *Bhakti*, or love. There are many traditional paths which cater for this need, so we might wonder whether there is a Direct Path equivalent. In other words, is it possible to have a path of devotion without an object of devotion? A path in which there is no separate self devoting itself to God? Here is Rupert’s answer:

Is there a place for Bhakti or devotion in this approach?

To be truly devoted means to give our whole self to the object of our devotion at all times. The only object worthy of or even available for such devotion or love must be something that is always present, for we cannot give ourselves completely to something that is intermittent.

There is no true object of devotion, because all objects are intermittent. Only Awareness is ever-present, and therefore only Awareness merits true devotion. And what could give Awareness this devotion? Obviously an intermittent object such as a body or a mind cannot render devotion to something that is present when it itself is not. Therefore, only Awareness is able to impart this devotion to itself.

It is only Awareness that can be truly loved and it is only Awareness that can truly love. However, Awareness does not love and is not loved. It *is* love. So the highest form of love or devotion is simply to abide as Awareness, knowingly. Any other sort of devotion would be the devotion of an imagined entity for an imagined object.

However, the imagined entity that looks for a direction in which to turn and for something to turn towards does not realise that the attention it is apparently using for this purpose is already the Awareness that it seeks. It is like a current of water searching the ocean for water.

‘Lord, Thou art the love with which I love Thee.’

Every object or direction which appears as a possible recipient of the mind’s devotion is an object it has created within itself and cannot therefore be the true object of its devotion. Any object is simply more mind.

As the mind searches for a direction in which to turn, it is, without knowing it to begin with, tracing itself back to its source. Finally, having explored all directions, it reaches a dead end. It comes to the knowledge that there is no known direction in which it can turn, nor is there an object worthy of true devotion. In short, the mind cannot know what devotion is.

With this understanding the mind falls silent, which means it dissolves. What is revealed *is* devotion. Devotion is what we *are*, not something we *do*.

[*Presence Volume 2: Devotion*]

In a sense, the devotional path and the path of self-enquiry can be seen as one path. However, in those who are devotionally oriented, the emphasis may be different:

Sometimes we may not feel like undertaking the detailed investigation of the 'I' thought at the level of the mind or the exploration of the 'I' feeling at the level of the body, and at such times we may simply surrender everything to the aware presence that we intimately know ourselves to be.

This surrendering may take two forms. If it is obvious that what we are is this open, empty, space-like presence of awareness, in which the apparent objects of the body, mind and world are arising, then we may simply take our stand as this presence.

We simply take our stand knowingly as this presence and allow everything to take place within it without any agenda or interference, just as the space of this room allows whatever takes place within it.

However, if we seem to be something other than this presence, in other words, if we think and feel that we are a separate, inside self, our surrendering may be a little more active. It may take the form of an offering. We offer our thoughts, feelings and perceptions to this presence.

Either we take our stand as this open, allowing presence or we offer everything to it. The two are, in fact, identical. There is nothing that cannot be allowed or offered—our most trivial thoughts as well as our deepest, darkest feelings. We allow everything, offer everything. ...

Nothing more than this allowing or offering is required. In the past, our being—this open, empty, allowing presence—was appropriated by the body and mind and seemed, as a result, to take on their properties. That is, our self seemed to become limited, located, of a certain age or gender, dense, solid and destined for death.

This surrendering or offering is the reversal of this process. Instead of our self taking on the qualities of the body and mind, the body and mind begin to take on the qualities of this open, empty, transparent presence.

It is like dropping a sugar cube in a glass of warm water. The water doesn't do anything and the sugar cube doesn't do anything. However, the sugar cube slowly becomes like the water. It loses its name and form. The quality of the water—transparency, warmth, openness, emptiness—takes over the sugar cube; it dissolves it into itself.

That is similar to what happens in this allowing or offering. Nothing is done by anyone to anyone or anything.

The one that would seem to be doing the offering is itself offered up.

The body, mind and world are simply surrendered and, in their own time, they become infiltrated and pervaded by the transparency, openness, emptiness and intimacy of our own being.

The fears, anxieties and tensions that characterize the separate, inside self slowly dissolve in this transparency, not through effort, discipline or manipulation of the body or mind, but effortlessly and spontaneously.

[Presence Volume 1: Surrendering Everything to Presence]

Ultimately, as the Shankaracharya has explained, we all need to travel both aspects of the spiritual path. In the Direct Path there seems to be a gradual transition from enquiry to surrender and objectless love which happens naturally. Here is Rupert's advice from the last retreat to someone who was exploring that transition:

Q: I can understand how to live the life of a monk, loving only God, and for some moments I do that. But how can I 'live love for love' in daily life, sharing it with things outside of me?

RS: Visualise love as the field of your heart. So visualise your heart, not as a physical organ, obviously, visualise it as just a field at the centre of yourself. And that field can be more or less open. It can expand – it can go on and on and on expanding until it includes everything. Or it can contract and just include one or two people, one or two things. So think of the natural condition of the heart as infinitely open so that everything and everyone is contained within that field. It doesn't mean to say that we love every single object or person – it's not possible to love an object or person – but rather that every object and person is included within that field and therefore is touched by that field. ...

Normally we think of love as a beam, like a flashlight – a beam of love that we direct towards some people but not towards others, that we direct towards some objects or situations and not towards others, that we direct towards some feelings and not towards others. That's the normal way we love. We love objects. We shine the beam of love on certain objects or feelings, and not on others. So that's why I've replaced that model of love with this sphere. A sphere of love is not directed towards anything or anyone. It includes everyone and everything. The wider it is, the wider the sphere of inclusion. But it is never directed towards an object or a person. So that is love that includes everyone and everything, but is not directed towards any particular person or thing.

Q: I understand that. But my question is to understand how to have a lover, because isn't this a person? Because that is a special love.

RS: It's not a special love. There are no special types of love. There is only one type of love – it's just absolute, unconditional love. But having a lover is a particular way of expressing or celebrating that absolute, impersonal love. So it's fine. You have a lover, you have a child, you have a friend, you have a neighbour. They all come within the compass of love, within this field of love. But it doesn't mean that you express love to each of them in the same way. You express the same love, the only love there is – impersonal, unconditional love – you express it in different ways with different people.

Q: But it seems that this kind of love towards objects is more dangerous. My problem is to love something you could lose.

RS Don't love anything or anyone. Don't think of love as something that you give or shine on a particular person. Think of love as just the field of your heart, which as your heart expands and opens, it includes more and more and more of your experience. So that in the end there's room for everyone and everything in it, including your deepest, darkest fears. Including everything. So don't feel 'I love a person'. Feel that this person comes within the field of love, and therefore is bathed in the love that I feel. But it's not specific to this person. I share it, celebrate it with this person, but it's not exclusive to this person – or animals or trees and so on.

[Buckland Hall, 6th May 2017: *Reality is Neither Something Nor Nothing*]

The key characteristic of the Direct Path of Devotion which is different from all other devotional paths, is that there is no devotee and object of devotion, no lover and object of love, no teacher and disciple, no little 'me' and infinite God. We are not even devoted to a teaching. Rather, it is the collapse of any feeling of separation – the death of the separate self:

The person who seeks happiness and love is like the moth that seeks the flame. The moth longs for the flame above all else but it is the only thing the moth cannot experience. To experience the flame means to be consumed in it, to die into it. That is the experience for which the moth longs.

The only experience that the apparently separate self longs for is the experience of happiness or love. The experience of love is the dissolution of the limitations of the self. It is not an experience that the separate self can have; it is an experience in which the separate self dies.

[Science and Non-Duality talk: [Love is a place](#)]

Contemplation

Love is the name we give to experience when it reawakens to its identity with all things, when it recognizes itself in all things, as all things.