

## Ethics, Conditioning and Responsibility

Unlike most spiritual teachings, the Direct Path says nothing specific about ethics and morality, and doesn't prescribe any kind of moral code. Instead it takes us to a recognition of our true nature via as direct a route as possible for each individual. When we recognise that nothing and no one is separate from ourself, then whatever action we take will be universal. It will be the best action that we could take (given the information available to us) which would benefit everyone and everything as a whole, including ourself. But that doesn't mean that ethics and morality have no place in our lives prior to that understanding, or that there's no need to teach ethics and morality to our children. Here is Rupert's view on the subject:

When St Augustine was asked about ethics or morals, he just said 'love, and do whatever you want'. He was speaking to the category of person who has already understood that they share their being with all people, with all animals and with all things. They no longer need ethics and morals because everything they think and feel, and their subsequent activities and relationships are in line with this single understanding of our shared being. But for those who don't have this understanding yet, ethics and guidelines and morals are required. And ideally those guidelines are laid down by those who *do* have this understanding.

An example of one such moral would be 'love thy neighbour as thyself'. This is saying to those of us who don't yet feel that our neighbour *is* ourself, 'love them as if they were yourself until you realise that they are yourself, and then you'll no longer need any guidelines'. So as long as we feel we are separate entities, there is a place for morality and ethics. And it would be an abuse or a misunderstanding of the non-dual teaching to say or in any way to imply that just because everything appears in awareness, and is made of awareness, therefore it doesn't matter how we treat people or how we behave. That is a misunderstanding of the non-dual teaching. ...

True ethics and morality are those that come from the recognition of the underlying unity of all beings and things. All true morality comes *from* that understanding and is an expression of that understanding in relation to various aspects of our lives. And it is necessary as a guideline until we don't need guidelines from the outside, because we feel it from the inside. And not only have we glimpsed it from the inside, but we are well enough established in this understanding, to not just talk the talk but to walk the walk as well. In other words, to live this understanding, at least to a high degree. But until that's the case, we need guidelines that come from this understanding.

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This does not mean that all those who have recognised their true nature will respond in exactly the same way to a given set of circumstances. Our response will depend on our conditioning. And that's why in this teaching there can be no fixed set of rules or specific guidelines about how to behave. If we are abiding knowingly as awareness, our actions arise on behalf of the totality, and not on behalf of an illusory separate self. But what those actions are will be different for each of us.

Conditioning is something we were born with and all have. It is not a problem. Conditioning can and does change throughout life, but no one is free from or could become free from all their conditioning. All our thoughts, sensations, perceptions and therefore all our reactions are filtered through our conditioning. Our conditioning includes the shape and capabilities of our bodies, our musical or artistic inclinations, the types of food we like, the activities we enjoy. It relates to our genetic makeup, to cultural and family circumstances, and to life experiences. Some of it we consider negative and label as 'trauma', other aspects we consider to be good or helpful. Rupert has

given the example of some minds being conditioned to receive thoughts and inspiration about music, such as how to perform a Beethoven sonata. But those divisions into good and bad are only for a separate self – from awareness’s point of view, all of it is entirely neutral.

Our conditioning governs and is expressed in habits of thinking, feeling and behaving. It is only when we regard this collection of habits, beliefs and memories to constitute ourselves, a person, that suffering arises. We don’t need to get rid of our conditioning, and in fact cannot do so. As Francis Lucille explains, the recognition of our true nature doesn’t result in the disappearance of all conditioning:

*Does this collection of conditioning and memories, which we call the person, continue when no one is left?*

It is not important whether an I-image is left, but instead whether this concept still has credibility. For instance, I was brought up with the concept that babies are born in cabbages, but having had three children, this concept has lost its credibility! It may or may not arise, but who cares?

In practice the concept and the feeling of being a separate person need to be constantly fed and reinforced. When we no longer feed this concept or this feeling, they appear less and less. However, it is dangerous to say “never.” How do we know what is around the corner? It is only the ego that wants this kind of absolute perfection at the level of the body and the mind. If we are truly detached, we have no agenda with the ego, with the thought or feeling of separation, either for or against. It has no power over us. Only the ego wants to get rid of the ego.

[Francis Lucille, *The Perfume of Silence: Peace, the Universal Container*]

However, our conditioning is influenced and gradually changed by contact with the Direct Path teaching through reading, attending meetings and retreats, and our own self-enquiry. The more we abide as our true nature, the less impact the habits associated with our old belief in being a separate entity have on our actions.

But what about guilt associated with past actions? This is what Francis said when asked to comment on that:

FL: Guilt is always for the person. It’s only if I identify with the person who has done this, or who is doing this, or who wants to do this, or who is having this thought that he or she shouldn’t be having, that guilt arises. There is a basic and simple understanding that should liberate us from this. It is that we don’t choose our thoughts. The thoughts come to us – whatever they are – like today it’s sunny, tomorrow it rains, the day after there is a lot of wind, and then there is sun again. And our thoughts they come to us like the weather. Do you choose the weather? Do you feel guilty about the weather? Let’s say there is a hurricane. A hundred people get killed. That’s terrible. Do you feel guilty about having killed these hundred people? No. That’s God’s problem. It is the same here. You are not in charge of your thoughts any more than you are in charge of the wind or the storm. Therefore, what goes through your mind is God’s problem. That’s the best way to remove yourself from the sense of guilt. And it follows that as your decisions come to you as thoughts, you are not guilty of past decisions you have made. So you put the responsibility where it belongs, and that will give you a lot of freedom.

*Q: We may not choose our thoughts, but we are aware of our thoughts. So can’t we choose to act on a thought?*

FL: No, because the choosing thought that chooses to act is another thought.

*Q: Then it would appear that we are more like machines than we actually are.*

FL: Absolutely. As body-minds, as separate individuals, we don't choose our thoughts. I didn't say that as consciousness we don't choose our thoughts. But as consciousness, we choose the weather too. And as consciousness we are God, God's consciousness. So that's why I say we have to place the responsibility where it belongs, which is with God or with consciousness. So ultimately it is consciousness that is responsible, especially for the past. There has never been a separate individual. My teacher used to say 'there is not a single, separate entity in the cosmos'. There is only the illusion of such separate entities but there is not really one. So if the guilty entity is an illusion, where does the guilt go? There is no real guilt.

*Q: Let's take an example of a smoker who is trying to quit smoking. And the thought comes up 'I would like to smoke'. At that point, is there more freedom to choose?*

FL: Everything that comes from intelligence, comes from freedom. When we understand something, when we see clearly 'that's what I have to do', we do it. We *don't* do it only if it is not clear. But in total clarity there are no questions.

When we see clearly that  $2+2=4$ , then  $2+2=5$  doesn't enter our minds. Do we feel a lack of freedom because  $2+2=4$ ? No, on the contrary, there is great freedom in understanding  $2+2=4$ . I would be stupid if I said 'Gee, that's bad.  $2+2=5$  is not possible, it's forbidden. That's a lack of freedom'. It doesn't make sense. With understanding comes a great sense of freedom. Because the place of understanding or of intelligence in us is also the place of freedom. So they are never at odds with each other – they always agree. The place of love, the place of intelligence, the place of freedom – they are the same place. So they are always in agreement.

*Q: So if we make the wrong choice and pick up the cigarette we are not absolutely clear, not in tune with our true nature?*

FL: It may be possible that at that moment, that was what was meant to happen. It's difficult with the example you pick because of psychological addictions and physical addictions.

If we go back to the sense of guilt, let's put it in simple terms. The guilt is always for a separate individual. If I feel guilty, it is a sign that I am identifying with a separate consciousness. So I was giving this example to realise we don't choose our thoughts as separate entities, to liberate ourselves from guilt. But at the same time, I was demonstrating that there's nobody here as a separate entity, because if there's nobody here to choose the thought, there's nobody here to choose the action or whatever. So if there's nobody here, there's nobody here to feel guilty. Therefore, we have two options: either we believe to be separate entities, in which case we shouldn't feel guilty, because as a separate entity we don't choose our thoughts. Or the other option we have is not to believe to be a separate entity. But in that case, we won't feel guilty either. We feel like God who after six days says 'Oh, my creation is quite nice', then he went and took a nap. He wasn't feeling guilty about his creation – 'it was quite nice, a good job ...'.

[Francis Lucille: [Nonduality 11 of 16 - Regarding Guilt: Put the Responsibility Where It Belongs](#)]

For those of us brought up in a Christian tradition, the concept of right and wrong, and the idea of 'sin' is a deeply ingrained part of our conditioning. As a result, we not only judge ourselves, we also judge others. This is Francis Lucille's perspective on sin, from *Eternity Now*:

*Q: What is sin?*

Sin is nonsense. There is no sin, because there is no sinner in the first place. The only sin is to take oneself for a sinner. I grant that there may be inadequate behaviour, an action that originates from a fragmented view of the situation. Such an action will haunt one until the situation is seen again in its totality, at which point the underlying conflict finds its resolution in intelligence. But there is no need to wilfully recollect these "sins." Such a recollection only strengthens the ego. There is no point in condemning oneself as a sinner or in trying to change oneself. Sense of guilt and desire to change also reinforce the ego. One only need see these so-called sins for what they are, not take oneself for their doer, and forget them.

*Q: Sin is a 'big deal' in Christian societies like ours, and there is a widespread feeling, if not fear, that to take such a position, to simply forget our wrongdoings as we go along, might allow further wrongdoings that could have been avoided, had we taken a look at what we were doing. If we don't examine our mistakes, there may be a tendency to continue to commit them.*

I am not advising you to ignore faulty behaviour and not try to understand it. On the contrary, I say yes, understand, but don't attribute the action to yourself. Don't take yourself for a sinner. Understand that you were the witness of the deed, not its doer, and forget it.

*Q: Are you saying all mistakes can be traced back to the ego, and that the ego is the original mistake, a case of mistaken identity?*

This is certainly true for all ethical mistakes. If I am learning how to drive, I am going to make mistakes, and these mistakes are all right. They are part of the learning process. They won't haunt me in the future. However, if I behave badly toward somebody, my wrongdoing will haunt me, and I will come to the understanding that I have to undo the mischief. In this case, I should immediately do my best to remedy the situation, if possible, and then forget it. But there is no sinner, there is nobody who needs to be forgiven.

[Francis Lucille, *Eternity Now: Love Never Dies*]

## **Contemplation**

*Every appearance is an impersonal act of creation. Seeing this clearly, relieves us of any sense of personal guilt, blame, judgement or responsibility. However, this understanding does not lead to irresponsible or unloving behaviour. On the contrary, it enables the mind and body to function on behalf of impersonal love and intelligence, rather than representing the fears and demands of a non-existent self.*

[Rupert Spira]