

## The Roots of Ignorance

The aim of the Direct Path is to prepare the ground for a liberating glimpse in which we understand for ourselves that our essential reality is universal and not limited in space or time or in any other way. In that glimpse, the fear of death dissolves and we no longer feel any sense of lack. But even when we have understood that clearly, it is easy to fall back into ignorance and for those two deep roots of the sense of separation to return to the surface, from long-established habit.

As we saw in the earlier paper *The Role of Yoga Meditations*, the remedy is not to 'sit with the feeling'. Instead, we need to go back to the understanding we gained through the glimpse of our true nature. This paper looks in more detail at the tools we have available to do this. We start with a discussion about the fear of death:

*Q: I've been having intimations of mortality lately and it's raised a lot of existential fear. Sometimes I understand that I am consciousness and the body is in me but this attachment to the separate self sticks hard. Sometimes the fear is strong. How do I manage this fear?*

FL: We shouldn't manage the fear. We should understand the fear. The fear comes from a belief, a very simple belief, which is that our reality, our real self, is mortal. That's all. 'It's mortal and limited and vulnerable and can be affected. Not necessarily even mortal, because it could be immortal but still be affected by other things.' So, we have to discover the impossibility for our reality to be affected by other things, and in order to do that we first have to discover what we really mean when we say 'I'. What is our real self? What is our real persona? What is it that is afraid of dying?

If someone asked you: 'Would you rather lose your consciousness and keep your body, or lose your body and keep your consciousness?', what would you say?

*Q: I'd keep the consciousness.*

FL: Which shows that the centrality of your identity is consciousness, awareness. Rather than your body and rather than your mind, your mind meaning everything you perceive: your thoughts, your memories. So once you have established that, the question that remains is this: 'How do I know that this awareness which is hearing these words right now, is limited, is mortal for instance, or can be affected by things?' How do I know that experientially? Because what other people pretend to know, including whatever Francis is telling me, is not relevant to me. Because to me the only thing that matters is my consciousness and what I can know about it. What other people tell me is not experiential therefore I can take it as a hypothesis but subject to verification, pending verification.

So you are the final judge in this matter. Regarding the possibility that consciousness can be affected, ask yourself 'Is it my experience that my consciousness has changed? Not my body, not my mind, not the world around me because these three elements are constantly changing but I, consciousness, the reality that perceives all of that? Has it changed and how do I know that it has changed?' What say you?

*Q: It doesn't change. It hasn't changed.*

FL: Yes, That's something very strange, right? I am of two minds. On one hand, experientially, I have no evidence whatsoever that it has ever changed, that it has ever been affected by anything it perceives. Nevertheless, because other people believe that way, I am following the

party line, following the herd mindset and I believe that it changes, I believe that it can be affected, I believe that it dies.

*Q: Yes, that's absurd.*

FL: I mean, look, 'I believe that consciousness dies'. Who is there who comes to me and says 'I have had the experience of the death of my consciousness?'

*Q: I guess nobody.*

FL: Yes, right. It's such a simple basic self-evident statement that the death of consciousness cannot be experienced. Because in order to experience the death of consciousness that would require an experiencing consciousness, right? Think about your beginning. Ask yourself about your beginning as consciousness. Do you remember?

*Q: No.*

FL: So, if you don't remember, you can't have any proof that it has ever begun. Only you can remember the beginning of your consciousness, not your parents, not Francis, nobody else, so if you don't remember the beginning of your consciousness as an event, it opens the door to the possibility that it has never begun. Now the question is, would you admit that this possibility is at least as probable as the possibility that it has begun?

*Q: Yes.*

FL: That's very important for the following reasons. What is the rational approach? If you have a question which has two possible answers and you have absolutely no clue, no clue which way to go, how do you allocate the probabilities between these two options in the total absence of any element of information, the only rational way is to say 50/50, right? Because you don't know.

So, regarding consciousness being universal, meaning being the reality of everything, if it is real. Let's say it is real, unaffected by anything, universal versus mortal, impermanent. You should really allocate the probability by saying I don't know one way or the other, I truly don't know, I am as much open, exactly as much open to the possibility that it is eternal, universal divine, as that it is mortal, impermanent and based on a human body-mind.

We have to be truly honest with ourselves because our reason may tell us 'yes, it's 50/50' but then there will be a gut feeling inside telling us 'No, no, I have to go with the herd, I have to go with the party line. It's very unlikely that consciousness is universal and unlimited.' So we have to fight this so-called gut feeling using our reason, using precisely the arguments I have used and which have convinced you, because these arguments are not purely intellectual. They come from the actual experience of consciousness.

When I was asking you, do you have any evidence, you went to the experience of your consciousness, that's how you found out, so it was not an intellectual answer to my question. It was more than that. It was in fact experiential. So, because it was experiential, it is always there. You can always go back to that which seems like a line of reasoning. But it is a line of reasoning that takes you to the actual experience of consciousness and the answer 'I don't know' comes from that experience, so it has experiential power. And because it has experiential power, over time it will erode the gut feeling that 'That is not the case.' 'It's too far-fetched.', 'It goes against what 99.99% of people believe.' And that experiential understanding will give you the courage to overcome the conditioning that we have inherited from society, from our parents, educators etc.

And then we'll be in a state in which we are completely open to the possibility that consciousness is universal and that is all that is needed. To be open, completely open to that possibility and to live in accordance with it. To perceive, to think, to interact with people, to react to events in the world in accordance with this new possibility. You will see as you do this that life becomes a permanent miracle which it already was, in fact. Right? We just didn't see it. And now it becomes blatant.

So that's the general idea. Trust your intelligence, trust your experience of consciousness what it tells you and most importantly, what it doesn't tell you, that you are limited, mortal.

[\[Francis Lucille 20/07/2021, Bill Free's Book Club\]](#)

The fear of death is closely related to the sense of lack. In both cases, these core feelings often manifest as specific desires and fears. Here is Francis's description of how that happens:

*Q: You have said that the sense of lack is in the body. Can you elaborate on this?*

FL: The sense of lack I'm referring to is the kind of sense of lack that can never get fulfilled, that always remains, no matter what we do. It's an inextinguishable sense of lack, a fundamental sense of lack. And this fundamental sense of lack is at the very origin of all personal desires, all ignorant desires. So this sense of lack is the root of ignorance as it exists in the body, and that's why I call it *sense* of lack, whereas ignorance that exists in the mind appears in the form of formulated fears and desires. Of course, any form of fear or desire that comes from ignorance, has as its very origin some form of lack, the sense that something is missing.

But quite often, this sense of lack at the level of the body triggers the subsequently formulated desires for recognition, for love, for companionship, for power etc., that seem so necessary to our happiness. In fact these are simply expressions of this sense of lack, recipes which allegedly can put an end to this sense of lack, and of course it never happens.

So how do we get in touch with this sense of lack? It's precisely by observing our desires, our fears. Some are rational, they are just being cautious in terms of fear. But then there is a root of existential fear that seems to never go away, and that is really closely connected to this original sense of lack in the body. It's a sense that something is not OK, sometimes a sense of impending doom, the sense that something is missing, the sense that that which is *now* is not enough, and that experientially has never been found to be enough, and will never be enough, as far as we know. This type of sense of lack which we don't investigate because as we try to see it, it seems to be defended by a barrier that cannot be penetrated.

It reminds me of some physics. There are forces that surround particles. They are such that it seems that these forces repel any particle that wants to come closer. There is a barrier there. But then as they come even closer, then the opposite appears – there is a fusion that takes place. So it's the same here with our true nature. As we come closer to our true nature, there is a repelling force that seems to prevent us from going further.

There is an Upanishad – I don't remember the name – in which the sage tells the disciple if you ask more questions, if you investigate further from this point, you are going to lose your head, or your head is going to explode in some way, you are going to die. He refers to this force. And at some point, we have the courage to go beyond that, and beyond that we merge with the Absolute. You find that in all traditions. The gargoyles for instance, in the Gothic cathedrals, these repel us, these frightening figures of monsters. They are often called the custodians of the threshold of the temple. You find that in the Prologue to Parmenides' poem. And these are

frightening monsters, but they are there only to test the mettle of the truth-seeker, to test the courage of the hero on his journey to liberation.

So that's how it appears, an unpleasantness that may become an intense fear, and which we try to avoid almost at all cost, and instead of welcoming this fear, welcoming this resistance, we try to eliminate it, we try to kill it. We think that the goal of the yoga is to get rid of it, whereas in fact, instead of trying to kill it, the proper attitude would be to allow for it to kill us. To allow for the monster, for the guardians of the temple to devour us, to make the offering of that which is not that which we are, so that only that which we are remains.

[Francis Lucille, 18/9/2021: September Online Retreat – 2]

Later on in the same retreat, Francis was asked for some further explanation:

*Q: I can see that the fear of dying is similar to the sense of lack because it's a fear of losing something. In the case of the sense of lack it was experience – I just wanted to experience something. So I can see there's a similarity but I can't quite see the connection between the two fully, and I'd like to know how to get closer to these deep feelings.*

FL: The relation between on the one hand the sense of lack and on the other hand the fear of dying? Even the expression 'the fear of dying' is not the fear of dying. It is the fear that consciousness may be limited in time and space in any fashion.

So if I answer this question rationally and philosophically, the sense of lack means that something is missing. And if something is missing, this missing part is something which is not 'me'. Right? In other words, it is something which I have lost or something that I need to acquire. But it is predicated on the belief that there is something other than 'me'. And therefore it is predicated on the belief that I am limited. So here is the connection: on the one hand I believe that consciousness is limited. As a result, if I am consciousness, that's me – I am a limited entity. There are things that are 'not me' and as a result, that creates the sense of lack.

Then in ignorance, we attribute the sense of lack to objects. I would be happy, meaning this sense of lack would end, if I could find the missing fragment. And the mistake we make is that this missing fragment is an object in the world that can be found. But of course, anything that can be found can be lost again. There is no permanent ending to the sense of lack that can be discovered in this way. When that is understood, we stop searching for an object that can be perceived, which will put an end to the sense of lack. And then we can reach this position that Conan Doyle mentioned: Sherlock Holmes says somewhere 'when the probable has been eliminated, the improbable becomes certain'.

In other words, it seemed to us that the probable place to find something that would be an end to the sense of lack, was within the world of events and objects. When we understand that that is out of the question, the only possibility as the place to find happiness is the other side of our experience. In other words, the consciousness side, because our human experience has two sides: the phenomenal side – bodily sensations, thoughts, sense perceptions; and then the noumenal side, awareness, that which understands, that which perceives. that which loves, that which contemplates etc. Then, instead of seeking this completion, this plenitude in the world of objects and events, then there is a change of direction, a conversion. It is a 180° turn towards that which is not an object. And the indication is that we know there is such a thing as happiness because we have fleeting experiences of it. Once we understand that it was not in the objects, then the only possible direction is awareness.

*Q: I have had these glimpses, this happiness, but I keep on going back to looking for it in the world. Is it just a matter of keeping on enquiring?*

FL: That explains, however, why when you say you actually investigate it, the sense of lack dissolves. That is a sign that we have had a glimpse of our true nature. The one who has not had a glimpse, when they investigate the sense of lack, it doesn't go away without kicking and screaming. There is a huge resistance. There is a more dramatic resolution. So the fact that when you investigate this, it goes away and vanishes, that's a good sign, because ultimately, you can always go back to this place. The more you go back to this place of understanding, these occurrences of the fear of death leave you.

It doesn't mean that we don't have some kind of apprehension about any form of physical suffering, of course. And it doesn't mean that we don't want to be a good manager of this body, to keep it in working order as long as possible. It's a nice vehicle after all, it's a sacred tool.

*Q: In your answer on Saturday, you were talking about this underlying sense of lack which hasn't got any specific objects. I think I experience that, a thing that I would describe as being rather slippery. How does one open oneself to that?*

FL: Be interested in it almost like a scientist. Because often we bring ready-made answers for that – 'that's what Francis has said' – and we superimpose the answers onto the experience. Whatever I say is just an incentive for you to verify it experientially. That has to be very clearly understood, otherwise you just project. And you can find this tendency to project models onto our life. ...

So here, for instance, it could be the case that because I have said something, something happens in your life and you try to project in the same way. But no, that's not what I'm suggesting. I'm suggesting the direct experience of what I'm saying. ...

You can observe that whenever the fear of death arises, if you investigate it, if you connect it to your current understanding of the path, then somehow it transforms as a result, it evolves and disappears and leaves you in peace. And that's a very good sign. And now we have a tool, and the more you use this tool, the less you will relapse again into this type of event.

And then basically, to live this human life without projecting limitations in time and space onto our own reality which is experienced as consciousness. And then this human life becomes something very sweet, if it is lived coming from this openness and not knowing. Because if we attribute limits, it's because we know there are limits. That's wilful ignorance.

[Francis Lucille, 21/9/2021: September Online Retreat – 2]

## Contemplation

*When you look through your senses alone—not through your feelings or your thoughts—your perception is always pure and there is no ignorance involved. Ignorance appears only at the level of thought and at the level of feeling.*

[Francis Lucille, *Truth, Love, Beauty*]