

Anandamayakosha

The Veil of Bliss

Many of us were drawn to the Direct Path as a result of a glimpse of our true nature, a glimpse of the oneness of everything, or *samadhi*. It may have occurred through some form of spiritual practice, but it can also arise spontaneously in someone who has no interest in spirituality. Either way, that glimpse almost always brings with it a feeling of deep peace, causeless happiness, or sometimes ecstatic joy. Mind and body are relaxed and lack nothing.

Having heard or read about the awakening or enlightenment experiences of various spiritual teachers, we naturally label our glimpse as an awakening or enlightenment experience. Then the experience fades, and we want to find a way back to it. But usually we are (correctly) told there's no way back. What we may not be told is that our desire to go back to that experience is an indication that we have misunderstood the glimpse and misunderstood what is really meant by awakening or enlightenment.

In the following quote, Francis is responding to a questioner who was confused by a passage from one of Jean Klein's books in which he says that someone who has an experience of *samadhi* can end up in a worse position than an ordinary person who has never had a glimpse¹:

FL A blissful state of the body or of the mind is not the experience of our true nature. Now, the experience of our true nature can trigger a blissful state of the body and of the mind that is going to last for a little while and then will seem to evaporate. In this case, there is a possibility of confusion, of misunderstanding of the nature of the glimpse, and that the glimpse is understood as this state of the body and of the mind – relaxation, emptiness, blissfulness. Whereas, in fact, this state of the body and of the mind, the *samadhi* itself, was the way the body-mind responded to the glimpse, like the way a string or string instruments respond to being plucked or being struck by the bow.

So then, it doesn't mean that there was not a glimpse, but it means that there is a misunderstanding as to the nature of the glimpse, and as a result, the student, the disciple, is trying to reproduce the *samadhi*, the condition of the body and of the mind, and of course, then there is someone hidden there who is going to do that, who has this desire for this state. And as a result, we fall back into ignorance.

Whereas in the first moment, the glimpse was this absolute letting go, this relaxation that takes place when we understand that there is nobody here, nobody separate, that our reality is this absolute reality of all things. And then, in the worst case, this ignorance, this attachment to the phenomenal residue of the glimpse in the mind and in the body creates someone who had the glimpse – and that's the worst part – creates an enlightened person who had the glimpse. And that's a fall even deeper into ignorance. The first fall into ignorance is trying to reproduce the state, but deeper into ignorance, someone who had the glimpse. Nobody ever had the glimpse, of course.

Once we have the glimpse, we can always go back to being nobody, and understand that. For instance, in my case, I had a very strong glimpse, perhaps two weeks after my first meeting with John Klein. And by strong, I mean that it had very, very strong side effects on the body-mind level. And then I was eager to see him and to talk about it with him. And then he said simply,

¹ Jean Klein, *Be Who You Are*, chapter 5, p51-52

well, did this experience have a beginning and an end? And in my innocence at the time, in my not-knowing, in my ignorance also, I said, 'yes'. And then he said, 'well, that's not the glimpse I'm talking about'. Because the glimpse he was talking about is always true. So it didn't mean that I didn't have the glimpse. It meant that I had the wrong interpretation of it, that I was precisely making the confusion between the glimpse itself, which revealed my eternal nature and the side effects on the body and on the mind, which were confined in time, had a beginning and an end in time.

The real glimpse triggers a phenomenon, and this phenomenal impact on the body-mind over time dissipates. As we get more and more established in it, we don't experience that as much ... you experience nothing in terms of relief, because you were already relaxed. You were already without the sense of lack. So there is no sense of lack to remove. You were without a sense of lack. You go to your true nature, and the world reappears.

[Francis Lucille 4/11/2023, Online satsang]

It is the sense of lack that leads us to pursue a goal of developing a peaceful state of body and mind. And that pursuit of a goal inevitably involves effort and practice. For example, we may use practices to get rid of uncomfortable sensations in the body, negative emotions and thoughts. We may spend hours every day in meditation and reading spiritual books to try to fill our minds with spiritual thoughts. We may travel the world, seeking out 'spiritual places' and 'enlightened masters'. Any of those methods will tend to increase the frequency of peaceful states of body and mind, and will provide a safe haven in times of difficulty.

But is that what we really want? Or are we really looking for something more, something deeper than just a peaceful state of body and mind? Francis describes an interesting example of how his friend Wolter Keers came to question what he really wanted:

FL: Let's assume you catch yourself pursuing a goal, like changing your bodily sensations. Then the question to ask is let's assume that I reach this goal, is that going to put an end to my sense of lack for good? And if the answer is 'no', then let go of pursuing this goal, because that's not the point. I often tell this story of Wolter Keers. He went to meet his guru, Ramana Maharshi, and he met him about three months before Ramana passed away. He would go to the Meditation Hall and in Ramana's presence he was undergoing this blissful state. But then he would go to his room and the blissful state would evaporate. And after a few days, he said 'no, that's not what I want, because I want something which is permanent which doesn't change. I don't care about a blissful state because a blissful state is nothing more than a piece of chocolate'. If you eat too much chocolate, it's perhaps good when you eat it, but then you have a price to pay.

So the next day he went to the Hall and when he was sitting and as he felt the bliss that he was entering this kind of projection, he made an effort to stop it – 'I don't want this because that's not what I really want'. And he said at that moment, Ramana Maharshi opened his eyes and was looking at him, and then he felt it was like an earthquake in his body, a tremendous shaking – it was not pleasant – like he was being broken into pieces. And that was his glimpse, when he understood the non-existence of a separate entity.

So why? Because before he was projecting a kind of state, or he wanted to stay in this phenomenal bliss. A phenomenal blissful state that was triggered certainly by the atmosphere that was there. But a blissful state is not the real goal. The real goal is freedom.

[Francis Lucille, 16/11/2023, Thanksgiving retreat]

It's worth pondering why we keep returning to our old beliefs: that we need to do something to 'become enlightened' rather than simply understand; that a person can become enlightened; that some people are enlightened sages and never fall into ignorance; that there is a higher level of consciousness towards which mankind is evolving. Is it because we confuse consciousness with mind? So when we feel a sense of bliss, we attribute it to the perceptions that are present in body or mind, rather than recognising it as an ever-present, innate characteristic of the unchanging background within which all perceptions appear? This is Francis's analysis of what is going on:

FL: What is important is to understand that the bliss of this blissful experience has nothing to do with the perceptions that may have appeared – the perception of a relaxed body, of a transparent body, the perception of a mind which is slow, of a mind which seems clear.

The peace, the peace of the background, when there is no ignorance attaching to the perceptions, makes the perceptions blissful, if you will. Or joyous, or happy, or funny, or sweet, or whatever, because it depends on the nature of the perception. Then the perceptions take all kinds of different qualities, but I could call those basically to be beautiful, to be loving, to be intelligent, to be funny, to be sweet etc.

So, the bliss itself is in the intervals between the perceptions. If we believe that the bliss is in the perception, in the state which is perceived, then we become someone again, we become identified with the mind again. We are attached to the perceptions that appeared during these moments. We try to reproduce them, we have nostalgia for them, and that's a misunderstanding of the nature of the glimpse.

Why do we have, as a result of a glimpse, a sense of freedom? It's because in the glimpse, it gets revealed that we are independent from all perceptions. Our freedom gets revealed. But then, this tendency to attach our bliss, our freedom to the perceptions comes back. And in different traditions, there are words for that. In the Indian tradition, they call it the veil of bliss, the veil of a blissful state.

Sometimes someone has a glimpse, – not someone – a glimpse appears, if you will. And then this ignorance comes back, and we become someone who had a glimpse. And we become a teacher going on the internet saying, 'I had a glimpse'. And in the Zen tradition, they call this the stench of the glimpse, the stench of the *satori*, you know. Because you actually go back to being a person who had the glimpse.

So all these types of experiences, I mean they are natural, they are normal, we go through them. In most cases they are part of what happens after – I wouldn't say the first glimpse because we never know when the first glimpse happened, but what happens after a glimpse which was substantial enough 1) to create this sense of bliss. 2) to create a memory, a recollection of the event as something, as a turning-point in our experience, a turning-point in our life. 'Oh yes, I was completely changed during this moment.' We have to understand that nobody was changed. It's hard to admit. But nobody was changed, no matter how big the change was. We have to be careful about what we are saying because if we say 'I was changed', we are already somehow saying something which is not true.

So, what I could say practically is to always stick to what the glimpse revealed to you at that moment, or during those moments or those glimpses between perceptions, that is always true. And true everywhere – that is true now, that is going to be true tomorrow, that was true yesterday. Because only that counts. And which is true everywhere, which means which is true of me, which is true of everybody else.

In other words, I'm not different. If people come and say, I'm different, Jesus was different, come on, no! Ramana Maharshi was different, no! They were human beings. Or they were universal awareness, which we all are. But there is nothing in between, that's the important point to understand.

The theory is you get a glimpse, and then after the glimpse you get established in the glimpse. These are ways of saying things, but there is nobody who ever gets established. That which was in the glimpse was already everything there is. And in fact, whatever is right now is this reality.

And ignorance is not something bad, it's a game we are playing for as long as we want to play it. And this world is whatever it is, but it is us, it is what we are. It is our world with all the misery, with all the diversity, with all the beauty, and with all the ugliness.

[Francis Lucille, 28/1/2023]

Non-duality teaching has become a sizeable industry. Many, if not most teachers in the market-place offer methods and techniques for reaching a temporary state of peace, but fail to impart the understanding that this peace is our unchanging nature – that it was always with us, is with us now, and will always be with us, as it cannot be separated from us. Nobody changes. Nobody 'becomes established'. There's no goal to be achieved, no special or higher state of awareness to go back to, nothing to forget or to remember, because there's no-one to forget or remember. There's nothing we need to do or practise.

However, even after many years following the Direct Path, the ingrained habit of feeling 'I am someone, I am limited, I lack something' can return, often in disguise. Here is a dialogue with Francis illustrating this problem:

Q: I feel like I know, when I'm not kind of underwater, beyond a doubt that the only reality, the only true substance is this timeless, living, beingness. So I have no question on that. It's the times that I kind of go underwater ...

FL: Listen. The problem is the belief that you are someone who goes underwater. See that you *are* the water. What does it mean for the water to go underwater?

Q: Well it means the conscious knowing of myself as that loving presence going underwater, by that I mean there's a forgetting of that.

FL: Yes, but who forgets? You see again you recreate someone who can go underwater. If you understand that you are the water – I go back to my question – what does it mean for the water to go underwater? There is nobody there who can go underwater. There is only the illusion that there is someone there who can go underwater. There'll only be water from day one.

Q: Yes, I know that intellectually. I mean I know that one time, and then I forget it.

FL: Yes, but don't call it intellectually, don't call it logically. Call it experientially. Because either you know it or you don't. And if you know it, it's experiential.

Q: Yes I know it experientially, and then I forget it experientially. And I know it's our freedom to be in ignorance.

FL: And the beauty of it is it's a free country. In other words, you can come out of it at any moment of your choosing. So what is the problem? It's like someone who believes he's a prisoner because he never looks at the door of his prison cell and in fact the door is open. And he's told the door is open. He has never been a prisoner; the door has always been open.

Q: Is this door that is open, that you're speaking of, the door to stability and not forgetting again?

FL: No object can be stable. If you seek stability from the vantage point of being a person, you will never find it. The stability is your own true nature, that's all.

Q: I'll put it this way, Francis: I want to have what you have. You watch your TV programs or your tennis matches and you're like 99% just conscious. There's something else that's just not done here.

FL: But I'm telling you, simply stop it². Stop this habit of believing to be a person when you have no evidence. Stop it. Just stop it because it's your freedom. Ignorance is the exercise of your freedom, it's your choice. See it. See that you can stop it at any time, because there is no need to believe to be a separate awareness. No need. No evidence whatsoever. So be whatever it is that you are, and enjoy it.

Q: And the litmus test will be satisfaction.

FL: I would say the first litmus test is truth because truth brings about real satisfaction. It's very different from the satisfaction of a big piece of chocolate or something like that. That's a temporary satisfaction. Truth is eternal. So when we understand something, that's it. It's not just true in the moment, it's not just good in the moment, it's good forever. So seek your comfort in truth, not in other forms of satisfaction.

[Francis Lucille, 5/2/2022, February retreat]

Contemplation

If this investigation is successful, you will penetrate the nature of the true aim of all desire. What any desire really aims at, is a state of non-desire. This non-desire is a state in which we demand absolutely nothing. Thus it is a state of extreme abundance, of fullness. This fullness is revealed as being bliss and peace.

[Jean Klein, *Be Who You Are*]

² Francis is almost certainly referring to this video which he has often recommended: *Stop It - Bob Newhart* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvuijypVVBAY>