

The Path of Devotion

The direct path is sometimes described as being dry and intellectual. But is that implied criticism justified? Is it all head and no heart? Is there room for devotion in the direct path? Is it possible to recognise our true nature through a path of devotion?

In the following dialogue, Francis explains that the direct path is experiential rather than purely intellectual. It is a path of understanding, and love and understanding are inseparable attributes of consciousness, our true nature.

Q: You have said that this path is more intellectual. But where does the heart come into play and how does one unite the heart and mind?

FL: I'm not sure I've said this path is more intellectual. The difference between the *jnani*, the one who is on the path of knowledge, and the *bhakta*, the one who travels on the path of devotion, is very simple. They are both devotees. They are both lovers. The difference is that the *bhakta* is a lover of some object. Whereas the *jnani* is a lover of that which is not an object. So, because the Absolute is not an object, the *jnani* is right, right off the bat. It's called the direct path.

The *bhakta*, has to undergo substitution of its *ishtamurti*, of the that which he loves. Substitution that would make the object, which is still an object of his or her love, more and more transparent, more and more evanescent, if you will, up until it becomes pure love, truth and beauty. At which moment it is no longer an object.

The word 'intellectual', can be understand in two different ways. One way to understand it is that it is conceptual. 'Intellectual-conceptual', meaning it remains within the realm of concepts. The other way is 'intellectual-experiential', because consciousness is an experience, it is not a concept. People who don't know better, in their confusion, they believe consciousness to be some kind of concept, in other words, a thought. Because they put consciousness in this realm of thoughts that they have never explored. And they say that's for the intellectual, that's not what I want. What I want is ice cream and chocolate, things that I can feel. Spiritual experiences, big thick joints.

You have said that this path is more intellectual, but what often remains unsaid, in this type of question is where does the heart come in? It means there is no heart. It means heart is better. It means my guru is better than your guru. Your guru is an intellectual; my guru is heart. As if intelligence and love were at odds with each other. Which is really stupid. Because in fact, they are two sides of the same coin. When you have one side of the coin, you have the coin and therefore you also have the other side.

Think about it. In a moment of true love, for instance when you deeply love someone in a given situation. Isn't there a deep understanding going on at the same moment? Can there be true love without understanding? Can there be true love for one person without understanding that person? The love for a child is when you *understand* your child. It's not when you love your child by saying, OK, I am a parent, I need to do that because I love my child. ...

So love and understanding not only are not at odds with each other. But they are two sides of the same coin, one and the same thing.

[Francis Lucille, 19/3/2017 Temecula Dialogue]

Devotional practices take many different forms in the spiritual and religious traditions, but devotion is seldom mentioned in connection with the direct path. Here is a commentary by Francis on the

traditional forms of devotional practice and how these differ from the pure devotion that arises automatically on the direct path.

FL: Devotion is love for the truth, love for the divine. A devotee is one who has fallen in love with that which is beyond the world. No longer with the world, but with that which is beyond the world. But ultimately, to discover that it is nothing else than his or her own consciousness.

There are various kinds of devotion. Devotion can be towards an object that points to the truth. We could call it indirect devotion. It can be devotion to a holy book – fundamentalism – or devotion to a religious organization. It can be devotion to a set of concepts, a dogma, a religious dogma. It can be devotion to a specific image or representation of the divine, such as Shri Ganesha, Shiva, Vishnu. It can be devotion to a dead guru or to a living guru. It can be devotion to the divine qualities, which is a higher level of devotion. And finally, it can be devotion to that which has no name and all the names. And that's the devotion of the *jnanin*, the one who *truly* travels through the path of knowledge, not intellectually with concept, but experientially with his or her investigation. This one is devoted to the truth alone. That's the highest form of devotion.

So often the reproach is made to the *jnanin* that they don't know love. Whereas in fact, not only do they know love, but their love is extremely pure. But of course I'm talking about the real truth-lover. Not the intellectual truth lover, not the ones who are in love with interesting hypotheses that they have never dared put to the test for themselves. That's the difference.

Once we are in love with truth as an Advaitin, it would be kind of a childish thing to do, to progress on the lower path of love, of devotion. But at the same time, we can recognize among those who have this type of practice, this type of devotion, the path of truth which is there. That's why here in this room we have various *Ishtar-murtis*, representation of the divine, but we don't worship the representation of the divine. We don't burn incense in front of them. We don't pay our respect to pieces of stone or wood or metal. We pay our respect within our heart to this presence. That's a higher path. We cannot go down to matter, to images.

When the divine reveals itself, that's true knowledge, and it turns a truth seeker into a truth lover forever. Love is an effortless thing. This surrender, this devotion, is not an action we do. We don't devote ourselves. We get devoted.

[Francis Lucille 2015 February retreat, week 2 day 5]

Using an example from Sufism, Francis explains how the path of devotion can lead to an understanding of our true nature:

Q: I remember an Advaita teacher mentioning that devotion has no place in the Advaitic tradition. Then I read from John Klein, that devotion is the total absence of oneself. Can you expand on that?

FL: The example of that is in the Sufi tradition. They talked about the *fana*, which means the extinction, the dissolution of the me, that has given rise to the word fanaticism. And the idea is, 'only He is – I am nothing'. That's the absolute devotion, which is a disappearance of the devotee. The devotee is nothing, and the object of devotion, God, is everything. So if the devotee is nothing and God is everything, there is only God. So 'wherever the eye falls in the face of God', that's the experience of non-duality.

Q: Is there a small portion of it which still says that I am nothing in this relationship?

FL: No, there shouldn't be. The very moment I am nothing, I become everything. In fact, this nothing is simply the dissolution of the same thing I believe to be in the All which I am. So I have never changed. I've always been the same consciousness. So the disappearance of the something I believe to be in the All, or in the whole, or in the All which I am, is the absolute devotion.

That's the story of the moth and the flame. When the moth hits the flame. Up until that moment, the moth is in love with the light, right? And flies around the flame. At that moment, the devotion has not reached its perfection that Jean Klein is alluding to, when he says it is the total absence of the devotee.

Q: So in the total absence, there wouldn't be any devotion as such, would there be?

FL: I think so, yes. There is still, because not on the level of consciousness, but the body-mind becomes a perfect devotee in that sense. Because the body-mind remains devoted. And often, the sages who have been brought in one tradition, then they stay in the tradition. They keep doing the prescribed rites and so on. They know better, of course. They know the full meaning of those rites, but they usually don't want to *[stop]*.

[Francis Lucille, 25/11/2014 Thanksgiving retreat]

The paths of devotion, *bhakti*, and understanding, *jnana*, seem to start from a very different place. But as Francis explains, they converge when the *jnanin* falls in love with truth and the *bhakta* lets go of the illusion of separation between himself/herself and the object of devotion:

Hi, Francis. I have a question about the balance between jnana and bhakti. You said that there are other sages who worship deities, even after self-realization. And you said jnana is too dry and bhakti is too wet, so you should have a balance of the two. If you have an intellectual understanding that there's only one reality, then what should the bhakti be directed to? The things I worshiped when I was small, like Mahalakshmi or Ganesh, I don't feel reverence towards them now because I just see them as something man-made. What kinds of things should we have devotion to?

FL: Truth.

Q: So, if you're doing the self-inquiry because you want to know the truth, you said that's not enough, so how do we manifest this devotion?

FL: You know, the path of devotion and the path of understanding, they seem to be different only in the beginning. In fact, they converge. And they don't converge like that *[tips of fingers meeting]*, but they converge like this *[palms joined together]*. In other words, they are very, very close at the end, very, very close.

So, in fact, when someone is simply interested in worshipping, they are on this path *[right hand]*. And when someone is simply interested in mathematics or physics, they are still on this path *[left hand, hands not meeting]*. But then, when they are there on this path *[palms joined together]*, there is no distinction really between love and truth. Because the *Jnanin*, you know, he is in love. He's in love with truth, with understanding. And the *bhakta*, she has an intuition of truth also.

If the *bhakta* doesn't have an intuition of truth, but still is in love with a deity, with a form, with a *nama* or a *rupa*, she's not yet on the advanced path. To be in love with objects, the objects are more and more subtle. Then you are in love with Lord Krishna or Sri Ganesha, whatever. But

then you are more in love with the divine qualities. You see, with the divine qualities, the fearlessness of Krishna, and also Krishna's humour, and the teasing of the *gopis*, you know, and you are in love with all the divine qualities more than with the person. But at the end, you are in love with the invisible presence, which we all share. Vasudeva is all, says the great soul, and he comes to me.

Q: So it's only in the beginning that jnana alone is dry, but if you are advanced, then you have a good understanding?

FL: Yes, and in other words, the *jnanin* also knows the emotion of love. The *jnanin* can cry. The *jnanin* has all this emotion of love, but then these emotions are not triggered by a form. They are triggered because beyond the form, he touches the formless presence.

[Francis Lucille, 19/12/2020 *Devotion Should be Towards the Truth*]

So can the path of devotion, *bhakti*, be a direct path? And what would be the role of a realised guru on this path? Here is Francis's answer:

FL: The path of devotion or love can be direct or not so direct. It depends on what is being loved. For instance, love can be for a book. Love can be for a religion. Love can be for a saint, for a guru, for a person, dead or alive. Love can be for God, seen as separate from us or at least different from us. Love can be for reality. When love is for reality, that's the direct *bhakti* path. And then there is no difference between the path of *jnana* and the path of *bhakti*.

Q: One uses knowledge and one uses devotion?

FL: Well, the one who is seeking truth is in love with truth. So that's devotion right there. The role of the guru on the path of *bhakti* – hopefully the guru is free from ignorance, and as a result, doesn't take the devotion personally. And because he or she doesn't take the devotion expressed by the devotee personally, the devotion is redirected to the ultimate.

Q: That's why it's a freeing relationship.

FL: It's a freeing relationship provided the guru is free from the person. And so then the devotion is taken and as I said, redirected towards the right place. So this change of direction happens through some kind of imitation. We naturally spontaneously imitate what we love. So the devotee is in love with the guru. But in fact, doesn't really know who the guru is. The devotee is believed to be in love with the human being, the human body, the human mind, but because the guru knows what he is or she is and what the disciple is and that they are the same, through this imitation, the love is redirected to the right place.

So it doesn't matter what the path is. The only thing that matters is the freedom of the teacher. The *bhakti* path or the *jnana* path, these are intellectual distinctions. From the vantage point of the guru, there are no such distinctions. If the guru is free from the person, both paths are travelled at the same time, because this redirection takes place. The way it works, in the beginning, the disciple sees the guru as God in the flesh, if you will. And then eventually, the disciple sees the flesh of the guru in God. And the flesh is not important. This distinction between paths is very artificial because the only thing that matters, as I've said, is for the teacher to be free so that this freedom can be transmitted. ...

It's very simple. It's about happiness. It's not complicated. And there is the necessity at some point to have a rational path to happiness. Because at some point all the paths have to converge. Through love you can go to the experience of your true nature. But if the belief

systems in your mind are still belief systems of separation, you cannot be stable in it. And conversely, if the only way for you to go to the truth is through thinking, but if your feeling is still separate, you are not going to be stable in this happiness because your feelings are going to take you away. So the point I am making is that at some point the path of *jnana* is unavoidable. Just as the path of *bhakti* will happen also – it is also unavoidable.

But in a sense, the love of the *jnanin* is more pure than the love of the *bhakta*. Why? Because the love of the *bhakta* is still for an object. The moment the love of the *bhakta* ceases to be for an object, he becomes a *jnanin*. The love of the *jnanin* is for truth, which is not an object. Where do you find truth? It doesn't have a shape, it's not a human form, it's not a divine form. It's not even a divine quality. So that's why it is pure. So every *jnanin* is a *bhakta*. But the converse is not true.

[Francis Lucille, 20/11/2017 [The Path of Love vs Knowledge](#)]

Contemplation

The way to the absolute is threefold: the path of intelligence, where thought merges into truth; the path of feeling, where feeling merges into the oneness of love; and the path of sense perception, where sense objects merge into divine beauty. The three approaches converge onto the one centre, which contains happiness as well as truth, love, and beauty.

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