

Close Relationships, Love and Freedom

Human beings are social animals. It is natural to desire an intimate friend, someone we love and trust, someone with whom to share the joyful times and the difficult times. So what makes a successful relationship? For those of us who are following the Direct Path, does this friend need to be on the same path? Is a relationship with someone who has no interest in non-duality doomed to failure?

As Francis explains, we first need to understand that if we are looking for a partner in order to make us happy, we are heading for disappointment:

Q: How does the desire for romantic love and intimacy, both physical and emotional, fit in? They both feel so personal. How do they fit into the space of awareness and consciousness in an impersonal way?

FL: There are natural desires and needs. They are wired in our genes. So they are natural provided we don't see them as the sole necessary and sufficient condition for happiness. So, I'm not suggesting here to restrain or ignore these natural needs and desires. But if we believe that finding the right partner, romantic partner, is going to deliver the happiness we seek, we are going to be disappointed.

We live in a culture where this pattern is imprinted in us very early on. 'They lived happily forever after and had a lot of children'. Something like that, many children. So, already as a very young child, we are being programmed. That's why it usually takes a few, and sometimes more than a few, disappointing experiences to realize the solution is not to be found there. Nor is it found in a big bank account or becoming famous or all of that stuff that people desire.

So, a happy relationship is one which we don't need. In other words, it's one which doesn't come from neediness but comes from a desire to celebrate together our common nature. You see, it's very different. It's like a good glass of champagne. It's not a glass of champagne we need because we are addicted to alcohol. That's not a good glass of champagne. A good glass of champagne is the one we don't need. But because we want to celebrate our happiness, we are going to have one. You see, it's very different.

So it's the same. Our relationships are a celebration. Should be, ought to be a celebration. Before they are a celebration, they are yoga exercises. Gradually, the yoga exercises may turn into celebration.

[Francis Lucille, 18/1/2015 Temecula Satsang]

In the following extract, Francis elaborates on what he means by relationships being a 'yoga exercise':

FL: The yoga of relationships is a complex one. What is important in a relationship is to find a space of love, of understanding in which the mutual grievances can dissolve. And that's something relatively rare. There will be always grievances in a relationship, accidents, divergences of views, etc. But that which is important is to find a reset button somehow that everything can take a new start.

If both partners knowingly or unknowingly share this love for the Absolute, the reset button is there. If neither of them does, then there is no reset button. If only one of them doesn't, sometimes the reset button can be found, sometimes it cannot. If the reset button is there, the relationship will be what I call convergent. That in time the feeling will be that of

rapprochement, of getting closer. If the reset button is not there, it will be divergent. Of course it's not two straight lines, there are fluctuations, but the general trend is going to be one way or the opposite way.

[Francis Lucille, *Non-duality 14 of 16 – The Yoga of Relationships*]

When we become interested in spirituality, perhaps after a glimpse or on meeting a teacher, it is natural to want our partner to share our interest and enthusiasm. But this can be a source of conflict if our partner shows no interest. In the following dialogue, Francis emphasises that it is love that is important in intimate relationships, and for the relationship to work, each partner must respect the other's freedom. It's not necessary for both partners to share the same spiritual beliefs, concepts, and precepts, or to be devoted followers of the same or indeed any spiritual teacher:

Q: How to deal with a relationship in which one partner's only wish is to live to close proximity of a living Master, whereas another partner cannot stand a single word about religion, spirituality? Where is the compromise? I think I am lacking courage to make a decision. Would you please guide me?

FL: I think it's Khalil Gibran, in his poem 'The Prophet' who says that in our relationship as a couple we have to be like the pillars of the temple, with a space in between the pillars. In other words, in a relationship we should respect the freedom of our partner and also we should respect our own freedom within. To deny your partner the freedom in the relationship, and especially spiritual freedom, the freedom of thought, the freedom of expression, is not loving.

You don't have to make a stringent decision. But if I were you, I would stick to my freedom and I would respect the freedom of my companion. That alone will bring about all the necessary changes in the relationship. If there is love, the relationship survives. If there is no love, the relationship capsizes, but nothing gets lost since there was no love in the first place in this relationship.

Of course you may think I'm painting it in black and white ink and that there are no grey areas. There are grey areas, but at the end of the day it's a black and white thing, because either the relationship goes on or the relationship breaks up. Therefore it's a yes or no type of thing, it's a binary type of thing.

In life it is always better to get these issues behind us as early as possible. In this way you don't have to leave, you don't have to put an end to a relationship. You have just to stick to your freedom, especially in our modern era.

[Francis Lucille 24/10/2014 Temecula Satsang]

We might imagine that a relationship between two people who follow the same spiritual path is more likely to be harmonious. But this seems not to be the case. It seems to be just as common for marriages between people following the same spiritual path to end in divorce as for anyone else. And that applies equally to spiritual teachers. It's interesting to consider why this might be so.

We naturally expect those following a spiritual path to 'behave better' than 'ordinary people'. Maybe on average this is true, or maybe not. But what is clear and often goes unrecognised, is that human body-minds don't awaken, don't get enlightened, don't get liberated. Glimpses of our true nature may arise in a particular body-mind either spontaneously or through following a spiritual teaching. But even when that has happened, all the conditioning which drives the way that body-mind thinks and feels and behaves is still present.

If there is a real love and pursuit of truth then our conditioning can become more aligned with what we discovered in the glimpses. But all too often, what has been discovered gets taken the wrong way. For example, the teaching in the form in which we express it to ourselves and to others is taken as absolute truth, rather than just a model. And on the basis of this model, we construct a template for how we think a 'spiritual person' should behave. Then we judge the actions of our partner in relation to this template. In this way freedom is lost, conflict arises and love is lost.

If love and freedom are lost in a relationship, the first step is to do our best to find the 'reset button', resolve the conflicts and return to shared enjoyment of life. If this proves to be impossible, then we need to consider ending the relationship. This decision doesn't necessarily come from ignorance. As Francis explains, if one partner is unhappy in a relationship, then both partners will be unhappy. Therefore, dissolving the relationship may be the best solution for everyone involved:

Q: I am in the process of dissolving my marriage of 14 years, a partnership of 20 years. I notice that one of the final hooks or causes of suffering is some apparent belief that I am hurting my soon-to-be ex-husband. How can I work skilfully with this?

FL: Well, you have to make the determination, was I happy in this marriage? With as great honesty as possible. And then you have to draw the conclusion, if you were not happy in this marriage, if that's your conclusion, that no matter what your husband says, he couldn't possibly have been really happy in this marriage either. Because in a relationship the happiness is shared or it isn't. So we have to be very clear about that – that it is only to that extent that we are happy that the partner can be happy about the marriage.

We can be unhappy for other reasons, right? Because we have not won the lottery and we have wasted money at the races or the casino. That's different, that doesn't make it a bad marriage. You can still be happy with your partner or your husband. But if you are not happy in this specific compartment of your life, it means he's not happy either.

And then there is a moment we have tried to make it work but it doesn't work, and we reach a conclusion it will never work. And then the question that remains is only a question of responsibility. Sometimes there are children or there are financial responsibilities, sometimes it depends on the age.

But often to remain in a marriage when the other person is young enough and you are young enough to have a new life, a more happy life, to remain in it out of fear and weakness is not loving. Because then you prevent the other one from rediscovering his freedom and finding someone perhaps who would be more suited.

[Francis Lucille, 29/3/2015 dialogue-12]

In the following dialogue Francis gives advice to someone looking for the right partner. The questioner had a deep spiritual relationship with his previous girlfriend but was not physically attracted to her. For the past eight months he has been with another girl who he is very attracted to and with whom he has much in common. But he feels she is less 'spiritually mature' and there's not the same kind of deeply felt, silent communication as he had with his previous girlfriend. He wonders whether he should end the relationship:

FL: Do you feel that you can share everything with her or are there things that are too intimate to be shared?

Q: No, we share everything. I even share about this past girlfriend, about all the depth, we share everything.

FL: I'm not talking about the past necessarily, but in the moment itself to share your current thoughts, feelings.

Q: Yeah, she just went home and I shared everything that I expressed to you now. So I always share everything.

FL: In the moment, right? And does that open her to do the same?

Q: Yes. To share what she feels here. [in the heart]

FL: Because this silent communication between people is when there is complete openness. When nothing is... It doesn't mean to tell everything. That would be too much talk. But it means no fear, complete honesty, transparency. You have to be with someone where you can really be yourself. Where you can be as comfortable with this person as you are with yourself. That's the idea, right? And so she can be as comfortable with you as she is with herself.

Q: She feels a lot pushed by me to grow.

FL: Yeah, don't push.

Q: Yes, I find that difficult. And I always have this with people because I see a lot of things that I want to change in someone. I know that's not a good thing, but...

FL: Well, there are things that can be changed over time. Habits, for example.

Q: Yes, that's what I mean. If we're talking together and then she's on her phone checking Instagram, of course I share like: 'babe, I don't like this. If I'm with you, I like to be intimate and not be on our phones.' This is something I can share.

FL: I guess she's younger?

Q: She's four years younger. And it's because of these immature things that I feel 'ah, it's not a match'. But on the other hand, she really wants to grow together. And she feels that I'm impatient, that I have to give her time to grow and that she's so open and that she's...

FL: She's right. If she's open and willing, don't destroy it. Don't damage it. Just give her time and space to... If she's willing to change, give her time and space. And you be yourself, be willing to change also. Nobody's perfect. And no relationship is perfect in that sense. We are not like Ken and Barbie. ...

Q: I don't want to break up with her. I really care about her, but I just feel that I wish I had somebody that was spiritually more mature. Maybe that's in my head.

FL: Well, you know, spiritual maturity is about love. If she loves you, if you feel comfortable with her in that sense, that's spiritual maturity.

Q: Yes, I have this idea of a spiritual woman.

FL: Ask yourself, who would I like to spend the rest of my life with? A woman who is extremely spiritually mature, but she doesn't love me. And I'm not comfortable when I'm with her. And one who is not that spiritually mature, but I enjoy being with her?

Q: For example, I feel if she would be meditating two hours a day, I would probably feel more connected to her. But no, she really loves me. I can see this and feel this and yeah.

FL: Just give her time and space. There are two things my teacher told me about relationship and love. One is don't demand anything and you get everything.

Q: That's so difficult.

FL: The other one is that you cannot buy love, meaning you cannot do things that are not natural to you, that requires an effort to be loved. You have to be yourself, you know. You cannot be other than yourself because at some point you cannot sustain this attitude because it's not you. So you have to be comfortable with yourself and at the same time not demanding of the partner. And that's the best way to create spiritual growth in the relationship.

Because if you always talk about spirituality, I mean, she will have indigestion from it. You should actually do the opposite. You should be playing hard to get, hard to get regarding spiritual questions. If she asks you something quite spiritual, you tell her, 'oh, look at the tree there', or 'which dress are you going to wear tonight if we go to the restaurant?'. And that means she will have to repeat the question: 'that's not what I'm interested in, I'm interested in this or that'. So then you reluctantly accept to talk about it.

Q: Just one little fear that I have, you told once in a satsang that you realized afterwards it was always a bad idea to bring your new girlfriends to your teacher, and I'm doing the same in two weeks!

FL: No, I didn't say that it was a bad idea to bring anybody to my teacher, no. Quite the opposite. But I have often brought to my teacher women who were not apparently ready for that. So they didn't really stay with him. But I guess at some point in their life that was an accelerator of their spiritual progress. Because if you love someone you want the best for them. So for me the teaching was the best. It's like you don't want to take them to a heavy metal concert, you want to take them to a Sokolov recital.

[Francis Lucille, 23/10/2022 October Online Retreat]

If we have had a liberating glimpse of our true nature, and we feel that our partner hasn't, that can all too easily lead to a sense of spiritual superiority. Not only is this sense of superiority a sign of ignorance, and a lack of clarity in our understanding, but it can also become a block to a loving and free relationship.

What is important in a close relationship is a shared love of truth. Not a particular expression of truth, not a common belief system, not even acceptance of the non-dual philosophy. Just honesty, integrity, and openness to other possibilities including the possibility of a deeper understanding.

Having a direct revelation of truth through a series of glimpses is one way to happiness. But as Francis explains in the following dialogue, the experimental path of trying to live in accordance with the truth as we currently understand it, is equally valid and leads to the same result. In both cases, it's the strength and depth of our devotion to truth that brings about realignment of our body-mind conditioning. And it is that gradual realignment that brings partners closer together in a free and loving relationship:

FL: The path of trying to live in accordance to the truth, is much easier than the path of the revelation. Because the revelation may happen, or may not happen. And it may happen and be then misconstrued by the mind that neglects it and disparages it.

Q: And I can see why it's so attractive, is because the direct experience of consciousness is so dramatically clear when it happens.

FL: Yes.

Q: That therefore the idea of the direct experience of the universality of consciousness, to have that kind of clarity, once I know that that kind of clarity is possible, that kind of direct experience is possible, then it goes well, let's keep going. But I am not saying that in contradiction of what you are saying, I am just clarifying.

FL: And also, there is another aspect, is that many teachers, unfortunately, present this path as the only path to happiness. And then people are waiting, like in the Beckett play 'Waiting for Godot'. They are waiting for grace, they are waiting for that instead of just transforming their life, aligning, harmonizing their life, which is very much in their power. And then they remain in the garage, so to speak, waiting for Godot to show up in the garage instead of exploring the world, enjoying it. ...

So, there was this Zen teacher Suzuki and he said the same thing, as I say. He says a satori is kind of overvalued. A satori is nice, if it happens, but then there is still work to do, anyway. On the other hand, if you do the work, you reach exactly the same condition as the one you would have reached after having the satori and done the work.

The difference may be that the satori gives some form of certainty which is beyond reason, which doesn't come from any reasonable origin. It cannot be traced to any reasonable origin. Whereas in the experiential path, this certainty grows as the body of evidence grows, that we accumulate through experimentation.

[Francis Lucille, 30/11/2018 Thanksgiving Retreat]

Contemplation

That which we love in people is their reality, their real self, which is the consciousness. We don't love people. We love the life in them, we love the intelligence, we love the love.

[Francis Lucille, 3/12/2019 Thanksgiving retreat]