



Path With Heart, by Jack Kornfield

In undertaking a spiritual life, what matters is simple: We must make certain that our path is connected with our heart. In the end, spiritual life is not a process of seeking or gaining some extraordinary condition or special powers. In fact, such seeking can take us away from ourselves. If we are not careful, we can easily find the great failures of our modern society—its ambition, materialism, and individual isolation—repeated in our spiritual life. In beginning a genuine spiritual journey, we have to stay much closer to home, to focus directly on what is right here in front of us, to make sure that our path is connected with our deepest love.

When we ask, “Am I following a path with heart?” we discover that no one can define for us exactly what our path should be. We must look at the values we have chosen to live by. Where do we put our time, our strength, our creativity, our love? We must look at our life without sentimentality, exaggeration, or idealism. Does what we are choosing reflect what we most deeply value? If we are still and listen deeply, even for a moment, we will know if we are following a path with heart.

The things that matter most in our lives are not fantastic or grand. They are the moments when we touch one another, when we are there in the most attentive or caring way. This simple and profound intimacy is the love that we all long for. These moments of touching and being touched can become a foundation for a path with heart, and they take place in the most immediate and direct way. Mother Teresa put it like this: “In this life we cannot do great things. We can only do small things with great love.”

In the stress and complexity of our lives, we may forget our deepest intentions. But when people come to the end of their lives and look back, the questions that they most often ask are not usually, “How much is in my bank account?” or “How many books did I write?” or “What did I build?” or the like. If you have the privilege of being with a person who is conscious at the time of his or her death, you find the questions such a person asks are very simple, “Did I love well?” “Did I live fully?” “Did I learn to let go?”

These simple questions go to the very center of spiritual life. When we consider loving well and living fully, we can see the ways our attachments and fears have limited us, and we can see the many opportunities for our hearts to open. Have we let ourselves love the people around us, our family, our community, the earth upon which we live? And, did we also learn to let go? Did we learn to live through

the changes of life with grace, wisdom, and compassion? Have we learned to shift from the clinging mind to the joy of freedom?

All other spiritual teachings are in vain if we cannot love. Even the most exalted states and the most exceptional spiritual accomplishments are unimportant if we cannot be happy in the most basic and ordinary ways, if, with our hearts, we cannot touch one another and the life we have been given. What matters is how we live. This is why it is so difficult and so important to ask this question of ourselves: "Am I living my path fully, do I live without regret?" so that we can say on whatever day is the end of our life, "Yes, I have lived my path with heart."

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