

Pre-story dialogue for In the Belly of the Whale

These dialogues take place between Leo and his “Inner Storyteller” - the source of the stories he tells. Just as with the stories, they are created with no preparation and proceed with a life of their own. Leo’s words are written in normal text here. His Inner Storyteller’s words are in italics.

So, what’s the theme for this story?

Let’s take the theme of DEVOTION.

What does that mean to you?

It means doing things in a way that connects to my spiritual core, to the sense in me of the divine.

And what is that?

The most tender, the most precious place inside. The place inside where I feel awe and wonder and beauty.

Right. For many people this is how they would describe the “spiritual core” - a sense inside of something precious and sacred and beautiful.

So “devotion” is something to do with learning to link your actions, whatever they are, to this. How do we live in a sense of harmony and congruence with this core?

It’s not easy. But I feel that a sense of love and enjoyment are key.

Exactly! For devotion to actually be functional, there needs to be pleasure and enjoyment.

Think of a lover, let’s picture him as a man, but it could be a woman. This man loves his lover. She is to him a source of inspiration and beauty. Her beauty inspires him, and when they make love, the experience is DEEPLY pleasurable for him. Their closeness, their relationship, meets so many needs that for him it starts to melt something in him. Now he’s not so much thinking about himself all the time, he’s thinking about her, caring about her, and her wellbeing starts to matter to him in a very deep and intimate way.

He’s becoming devoted. But note how this relationship isn’t about him becoming weak, or small, and just giving himself away. He’s strong in himself, he’s fulfilled. It’s just that he LOVES his lover so much that something has started to melt in his heart - he’s becoming devoted to her.

It is EXACTLY the same when we consider the inner relationship. If there is going to be devotion, if something sweet and beautiful is going to spring up there, then there has to be PLEASURE, there has to be the regular meeting of needs.

Devotion doesn't come just because you tell it to, or tell yourself to "be devoted". It is a heart-opening process. You become devoted to something when it consistently meets your needs in some way, just like a dog becomes devoted to its master, who feeds it, takes care of it.

So, how to become consistently devoted?

We'll explore this more in the story, but suffice it to say now that we become devoted inwardly, to this inner spiritual core, when this relationship consistently meets our needs, and - especially crucial - that it is there for us consistently, and can meet our needs even in really trying circumstances.

Like a friend that was there for you WHENEVER you needed them. You would become devoted to this friend. They would endear themselves to you so absolutely that your friendship would spill over into devotion, because they had demonstrated this kind of deep reliability and helpfulness to you.

So, how do we cultivate THIS kind of relationship then?

By turning to this One as often as we can. By returning to this One again and again, to receive this kind of help. If you had a wonderful friend that you never visited, you wouldn't become devoted to them. So, you need to GO to this friend, and seek their support. So it is with the inner relationship. You need to go there regularly, receiving the support that is there, allowing yourself to be blessed, touched, supported and THEN you will start to feel this devotion arising, naturally.

Natural because you are not forcing it with "I must be more devoted", rather natural because, like the lover or the wonderful friend, you are being blessed by this One inside. Your devotion only grows because you are being showered with blessings. And the more you return to this relationship, the more you are blessed, the more will your devotion grow.

Okay, thank you. I have the sense we are ready for a story.... ?

Yes, we are. Is there anything you want to add about devotion?

Well, I'm not sure how easy the above experience is. It sounds a bit advanced.

What is YOUR experience then?

Er... well actually it's exactly as you describe here. The more I come to you, needing help, and then receiving help, the more devoted I become to you. The help I've received so far, coming to you with my problems and challenges, it just widens it out. Exactly as you say, my heart melts, I feel so supported.

There is within Christianity this concept of "bringing everything to God". Some Christian mystics talk about bringing all their troubles to God, and of laying their problems at God's

feet, and other such symbolic ways of describing this thing, and I find myself leaning into this as a reference point for what you are describing here.

EXACTLY. You lean into what is vast and infinitely resourceful within you. We can call that God, but we can call it the spiritual core or whatever you want to call it. But we know what we are talking about - it's this access point inside us to the ALL, to the vastness, the source of our life that holds and supports us.

Tapping into this, and then bringing ourselves, and all our troubles to THIS place, and receiving the help we need from it, THIS is the way to cultivate a genuine devotion, that's not forced, but arises naturally from this relationship.

That's beautiful.

I think we're ready for a story now?

We are!