

# St Francis Process

Andrew Gaines

Jean Houston studies the lives of great people to discover ways they handled problems in their lives that might be of use to the rest of us. She turns the stories of how great people handled certain problems into exercises so that we might learn their strategies and apply them ourselves. One that I have used many times with consistently positive results is modelled on an episode in the life of St. Francis of Assisi.

St. Francis was a wealthy playboy when he was a young man. By temperament he was a high sensate, and liked sensual pleasures. So the following story is especially poignant.

St. Francis's spiritual journey began with visions of a young woman he called Our Lady of Poverty. Following his visions, he began to spend time with poor people; ultimately he preferred the company of beggars to the company of his rich young friends. Nevertheless, he was still a high sensate.

One day, as he was riding down the road outside Assisi, his horse stopped beside a leper. Clearly young Francis had to deal with this leper. Lepers, of course, were shunned, and lived only by begging. St. Francis reports that he saw the pain and anguish in the leper's eyes, and was moved (as Jean puts it) "to get off his high horse and kiss the leper."

What happened was extraordinary. When he kissed the leper - going beyond the revulsion that most people felt, and that he would have especially felt as a high sensate - St. Francis felt an astonishing feeling of sweetness come over him. 'Dolce, dolce!' he exclaimed. Sweetness!

Jean saw in this story a way the rest of us could use to meet parts of ourselves that are phobic or prejudiced. So she turned it into an exercise. It goes like this.

## ST FRANCIS PROCESS

Pick something you have some strong emotion about that you want to resolve.

Set your intention to meet the part of yourself that carries the emotion, so to speak.

Now sit, and begin to rock as though you were tiding on a horse (this engages the motor system). Imagine that you are actually riding on a horse in medieval times - riding down a country road. Up ahead is a shadowy figure that represents the unknown part of yourself.

It will be indistinct at first, but as you approach the figure, it becomes clearer. Stop your horse in front of it. Look into its eyes, and see what you see there.

Now shift, and become that figure on the ground looking up at you. From here, do whatever seems appropriate.

In the workshop I picked something mild. At home I picked a serious issue: the part of me that felt actively threatened by men. I sat down, imagined myself on a horse (and did the rocking, of course). After a minute or so the scene became vivid:

*I was riding down a country road in the summer. The saddle of my horse was ornate. Up ahead was a shadowy figure wearing a hooded cloak. Drawing near, I saw a gaunt, almost skeletal adolescent figure inside the cloak-. Looking down into its eyes, I saw enormous pain.*

*Shifting perspective, I became the figure looking up at me on the horse. I watched the me on the horse get off, and come and cradle me in his arms ... at which point I broke into deep sobbing as that part of me received the love, which he had so longed for.*

It appears that our adult self can in some way love and nurture a deprived or injured child self. This perception – that we have at least two levels of consciousness, and that the adult can nurture the inner child – makes the idea of "loving oneself" concrete and teachable. We love ourselves by sending love and caring to the child within.

I have done the St. Francis process many times, exploring different aspects of myself. Often the process has led to very young parts of myself. Always it has been a healing process. I am now clearer and more centred, and I like myself better.

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