

Dealing with Conflict

Conflict, both inner and outer, comes from thought. But it's not enough to see that we don't choose our thoughts. If we are to live in accordance with that understanding, we need to look deeply into the implications for how we view events in the world, how we relate to 'others', and our sense of freedom. In the following extract, Francis discusses some of these implications, including the understanding that conflict is a natural feature of the universal play:

FL: Ask yourself the following question. You said, I have these feelings that my thoughts are my thoughts. Question: do you have the same feeling that the events in the world are as intimate, as much your events, as your thoughts are your thoughts? If not, there is work to be done. If there is no difference, it's just perfect, because then everything is your world, just as much as it is your mind. To have the same sense of being the creator, being the owner, being the decider, that you have about your thoughts. To have the same ownership, freedom about sense, feeling, about the events in the world. In other words, you have reached the correct intellectual conclusion, which is, my thoughts are cosmic events. They are not different from events happening in the world, or the thoughts of other people, and the decisions of other people.

Now, do I really live my life according to this understanding? For instance, about events in the world, and in particular about decisions of other people, do I endeavour to feel that these are my decisions too, exactly as my own decisions and thoughts? And the understanding that two well-meaning minds, meaning minds who are connected to the same reality, can reach different conclusions and take different actions in the world. Waves in the ocean are impersonal, and two waves can collide and interfere with each other. It's all part of the universal play. So even conflict, divergence of opinion, and apparent conflict between the inner events and the outer events, all of that has to be understood as being simply the movement of one single reality. Understood and also lived as such.

There is something else that is important. It's easy by looking at our thought processes to reach the conclusion, as a separate entity, I don't choose my thoughts because they just come to me, just like the events in the world. So either I choose everything or I choose nothing. But that may leave us with the feeling, yes, I don't choose my decisions, and I don't choose as a result the consequences. I don't choose the events in the world, and I don't choose the consequences. However, I suffer the consequences. In other words, although I am not a separate and personal chooser and decider and doer, I am nevertheless a personal victim. Then we have to understand that no, there is no evidence that the awareness which is at the receiving end of all of these events and perceptions is separate and personal.

So then this issue finds its resolution in the understanding that there is only one doer and there is only one perceiver. And that leads to the complete acceptance of all perceptions as being the universal play, the *leela* of this doer.

[Francis Lucille 14/11/2021 *There's Nothing to Get Rid of*]

It's sometimes assumed that there can be no divergence of opinion or conflict among those who are established in their true nature. But that's not the case. Two truth-lovers, acting impersonally, can arrive at completely different decisions about what action to take in a specific situation. However, as Francis explains, it is through mutual understanding that such conflicts are resolved.

We enjoy talking with people. We enjoy sharing understanding because as we share the understanding, it takes us back to the thing we have in common. And in fact, the experience of

sharing understanding, even sharing understanding about, phenomenal stuff or mathematics or whatever, is also the experience of love. That's why we enjoy it.

If we share understanding with someone, we usually don't want to kill this person. The moment there is mutual understanding, there is resolution of conflict, and all kinds of good things happen.

[Francis Lucille 28/11/2021, Thanksgiving Retreat]

In the following extract, Francis explains in more detail how this works in practice:

FL: If I talk to you if I am open to the possibility that awareness is universal it means I'm talking to myself. So that changes the nature of our interaction implicitly. Even if I don't say it, if I feel it, if before I interact, I establish our interaction on this new foundation which is in fact love, which is in fact 'I'm not above you, you are not above me, we are just the same'. You'll see how that already changes all of your interaction with people, which is important. Also regarding the world and the events in the world, if I am open to the possibility that my reality and the reality of the world are the same, my interaction with the events in the world is no longer a conflict or an opposition. Instead of life being my adversary, my enemy, my opponent, it becomes my accomplice or my friend. In other words life loves me. So we replace 'life sucks' with 'life loves me'. Because something happens and you think 'I don't like that' but at least be open to the possibility that down the road you will discover that it was not as bad as you thought it was. And down the road you'll see harmony in it. Be open.

So in other words, accept the events that come towards you from the world with a positive spirit. It doesn't mean that you have to accept them with resignation, because for instance if some events require saying 'no' to people or taking drastic measures, I'm not saying be passive and accept everything. No, no. Welcome everything that comes to you from the world. Welcome also the voice of reason and love in you that tells you how to handle the situation. But don't see the world *a priori* right off the bat as your enemy. Be open to the complementarity, that you are one with the world.

[Francis Lucille, 3/9/2022, Dialogue]

As Francis explains, it is not enough to be clear about this at the level of thought and reason. Our body needs to feel this deep connection with everything and everyone:

FL: I often say that the ignorance on the level of thought is perhaps only one tenth of the problem, but the separation on the body level is nine tenths. So if we can eliminate that in our connection with the world, in our connection with others, this deep connection we have will drive out any problem we may have, any sense of separation we may have as a residue on the intellectual level. Whereas if we resolve through understanding the separation on the intellectual level, but if we still have this resistance on the level of the body, this will come back to haunt us.

Q: So what should we do then? It's something that I experience now, there's more tension in the body, and there is more sense of separation.

FL: When you are when you are on your own, feel your body, allow for your body to contemplate the totality of your experience which includes your bodily sensations and your thoughts, without trying to achieve anything, without trying to resolve the tensions. It's like an old wine that you have pulled out of the bottle into the decanter – you have to wait for the sediments to settle, so that clarity can appear. So give yourself time for this contemplation, and

go back try even on your own to see that when the thoughts become more rarified, and when the bodily sensations come in, at some point even the bodily sensations lose their separation. Everything is free-floating in space and the bodily sensations and the visual sense perceptions appear in the same space. And then the body loses its localization experientially.

Q: So just devote some time to experimenting?

FL: Yes at some point it's not experimenting. You don't have to create it because it's already there. You just have to go back to it. You can go back to it when you are sitting at your desk, when you are walking in the street, when you are driving your car. These moments when we are alone, having nothing to do – we all have these moments – to get into the habit of going back to this sense of non-separation. Because then that creates repetitiveness in us so that we will go back to this experience, for instance, in the presence of others. And then that will change the nature of the connection we have.

[Francis Lucille 30/4/2022, Online dialogue]

Becoming established in truth does not mean that all our relationships become harmonious. In the following dialogue, Francis explains why that is the case:

Q: I have heard that all relationships and especially intimate relationships are really about spiritual growth. Can you talk to us about that, about relationships?

FL: Yes, all relationships are about spiritual growth. Relationships are harmonious to the extent that both partners are one, meaning that both partners behave, feel, think and act impersonally. It would be a mistake to believe that as we grow in wisdom, all relationships become harmonious, have to become harmonious. That is not the case because both parties in the relationship have to act and feel and think impersonally for there to be harmony. No matter how impersonal one of the parties thinks, feels, behaves, acts, if the other party acts from ignorance, there is not going to be much harmony in the relationship. That has to be clearly understood because most people think 'OK, if I get realized, then all my relationships are going to be perfect as a result'. That is simply not the case.

Q: So when you're acting from the impersonal self, would that mean that you are not disturbed or negatively affected by it, whether or not the other is acting from the impersonal self?

FL: It means, yes, that at the deepest level, we are not. On the outer level, we are, of course. We are not a piece of wood. Quite the opposite, the outer layer, if you will, is completely open and receptive to the feelings, to the thoughts, and as a result moves, responds. But deep inside, there is this unshakable fearlessness.

Q: So when I am in the impersonal self – I'm just thinking of something at work – someone can say something and it just doesn't affect me, but that...

FL: It can affect you outwardly. If someone says something outrageous, preposterous, out of line, you're not supposed to answer with a smile.

Q: I usually don't say anything at all.

FL: Well, you may answer in a way such that an external observer would say, 'wow, that's a very conflictual relationship'. Why not? I mean, if someone behaves in a way which is completely out of line, it is not compassionate to condone such an attitude, such a behaviour, because it doesn't give this person the opportunity to understand and realize. On the other hand, if we react to it

from ignorance, from a personal vantage point, then in this case too, we are going to deprive this person of the possibility to understand his own motivations. The impersonal reaction has to be truly impersonal, and our ultimate motive is for our response to be right for all parties involved. The right for all parties involved may mean that we are going to be very strong and adamant in our disapproval of a behaviour which obviously originates from malice or stupidity or ill intention.

Q: It's harder for me to react in the moment, because then emotions arise, even though maybe the emotion wasn't there originally. For me, it's better for me to step away, leave it for a while, and then maybe come back to it. But often what happens is that I don't come back to it.

FL: I am not going to recommend a recipe, because there is no such a thing as a recipe which is valid in all cases. All I can say is, whatever we do as a response has to be evaluated in the context. And as my teacher used to say, you may slap this person in the face or you may invite him or her to have a cup of tea.

Q: Are they both coming from an impersonal self?

FL: Absolutely, that's what I'm trying to tell you. Let's go to the extreme. This person says, OK, I just killed someone, because I wanted to take advantage of the money he had in his wallet. What are you going to say? Say yes, good, good, good. Go ahead, be my guest, do it again. Come on. There are actions that are outrageous. It's okay to be outraged. Outrage and anger may look the same externally. Someone may raise their voice, for instance. But internally they come from a different place, because anger comes from a personal frustration. 'How did he or she dare do that to me? How did he or she dare say that to me?' Outrage is different. It's not about me. I mean, how did he or she dare do that to anybody? To anybody, not to me specifically, to anybody. In outrage we take ourself, as a person, out of the picture.

So outrage is impersonal anger, and anger is ignorant outrage. Some people want to avoid conflict by all means. Why? Out of fear? Fear comes from ignorance. Or out of what people are going to think about them, not just ignorance, it's about the me image. Or out of a preconceived idea of what a wise behaviour ought to be. That we should always have a smile on our face, and always sit in *padmasana* on a beautiful lotus flower, right? Come on.

Q: Yeah, I don't smile, but I don't say anything either.

FL: Whatever we do depends on the situation as a whole. This situation has two sides: the outer side – what is going on in the world; but the inner side is there also – your own reaction, your own specificity. We're all different. Some guy is going to react immediately, another is going to be more standoffish and say 'wait a minute, I won't react yet, I'll let you know my decision in two moments'. We're different. These two attitudes can both be either personal, ignorant, or wise. In other words, the personal versus ignorant behaviour cannot be determined solely based upon the external appearance of it. We have to go deeper into the intention. What is the intention?

[Francis Lucille 30/1/2024 Online retreat]

Problems in relationships between students and spiritual teachers are common, can be distressing, and are often impossible to resolve because of a perceived inequality in the relationship. We may expect our teacher to be perfect and to always behave impersonally. But no teacher behaves perfectly all the time. The stresses of needing to make a living through teaching, the perceived need to maintain an image, and the unwavering adulation from students, can all too easily lead to a subtle

form of spiritual ego and discreditable or even abusive behaviour, especially in teachers with large followings. There are several well-documented and extraordinary examples of this.

It's important to have confidence in our own understanding and never give away our autonomy to our teacher. Teachers do not have superior access to truth. The game of ignorance can just as easily be played through a teacher's body-mind as through the body-mind of a sincere student. There is no hierarchy. As Francis explains, understanding is equally available to all.

FL: The truths of mathematics are universal, that's the beauty of it. Once you understand the relationship between pi and the series $1/n^2$, it's yours, it doesn't belong to your teacher, it never belonged to the teacher who was teaching that to you as a person. It belongs to all mankind and the entire universe, it's universal truth.

So what is true of the mathematical truth is even more true of the truth we are talking about here. Nobody owns it, and the ones who pretend to own it – I don't know – we should ask them why.

Whatever is said here, once it goes in your heart and your intelligence, it becomes yours. There is no copyright here. We cannot, that's important, we cannot have a copyright on the meaning of things. The copyrights apply only to the formulation, to the form, but not to the meaning, and that which matters here is the meaning. The meaning is our own treasure, each of us. And different people share it differently.

You know, there are a lot of people who are teachers, and I'm not sure I would like to have breakfast with them. But there are a lot of people who have no pretensions and they don't see themselves as teachers or whatever, and they are my friends. And I see them as more enlightened than those teachers with whom I wouldn't have breakfast. That's the truth.

[Francis Lucille, 9/4/2023 *The Origin of all Fears*]

But any of us can fall prey to what is known as 'spiritual ego'. Some progressive paths involve 'shadow-work' to help us avoid this. But in the Direct Path, we don't dig into the past to uncover the negative tendencies buried in our conditioning. We simply notice them when they come to the surface, and examine them in the light of our understanding. Here is an extract from my discussion with Francis on this subject:

JB: What protects us against our misusing the teaching to hide whatever comes up? ...

FL: Honesty, integrity. It is to stay true to the teachings, that's simple, it's not complicated. ...

JB: So there's not really anything we can do to stop ourselves misusing the teaching – either consciousness has chosen ignorance or it hasn't?

FL: Yes we have to be very honest. We are truth-seekers, we are not just truth lovers. We have to seek the truth like a prosecutor should do, or someone in a jury. We have to seek the truth with honesty.

JB: I think it's integrity that's the key. ...

FL: When we say 'lack of integrity' there might be two different views of this. One is that someone knowingly uses the non-dualist theory, out of ignorance. And there can be another case in which there is an honest attempt to choose the non-dual path ... but there can be perhaps a lack of clarity at this moment as to where in this moment these words are coming

from. They may be coming from 'yes, I don't want to go there because I don't like it', so some defensiveness. And we are not always absolutely clear in what we say sometimes. So there are different levels of lack of integrity. One is blatant lack of integrity. The other one is a slight forgetting that the truth is alive in every moment, and at every moment it cannot be replaced with the doctrine of the truth.

[Francis Lucille, 4/2/2023, online satsang]

Contemplation

All the problems of the world are our own problems, born of the ego. They come and go like waves one after the other. ... In a true approach, we find what fostered the problem, the root of all conflict and we step back. From the impersonal global view, the ego together with its problems is reabsorbed into pure consciousness, attentive awareness. ... It is only from this global view that intelligence and right action arise, and lasting change can occur.

[Jean Klein, I Am]