

Negative Emotions, Trauma and Non-dual Psychotherapy

A common misunderstanding and misplaced criticism of the Direct Path is that it doesn't address the negative tendencies, *vasanas*, that we all have within our conditioning. And in particular it doesn't deal appropriately with severe trauma. Neither of those assertions is true.

What is different in the Direct Path is that unless there are serious psychological problems or trauma which prevent a liberating glimpse, these problems mostly get resolved after awakening. The advantage is that this happens in a natural, easy way within the body-mind without reinforcing the sense of separation, in other words without building a nicer, more spiritual, more congenial 'ego'.

To understand how this works, we first need to be clear about the nature and cause of negative emotions. Let's start with a dialogue from Francis explaining what negative emotions really are, and the importance of tracing them back to their origin in me-beliefs or me-feelings:

FL: A 'me-belief' is a concept which I believe to be 'me'. And a 'me-feeling' is a bodily sensation which I feel to be 'me'. So there are bodily sensations, there are 'me-feelings', and then there are emotions, positive or negative, and emotions are bodily sensations that are of two kinds – positive and negative. And there are mechanisms in the body that are wired in the body, mechanisms of aggression and defence on the one hand, and mechanisms of relaxation and openness on the other hand. These mechanisms of fear and aggression or of relaxation and openness, can be triggered by feelings, by 'me-feelings' and by 'me-beliefs'. So 'me-beliefs' and 'me-feelings' will trigger negative emotions.

Negative emotions, once the body has been set in motion in that way, it's like you got on the train, and you have to wait until the flow of emotions slows down to get off that train. You have to wait until the train reaches the next station. So the 'me-feelings' are seemingly small things, very inconspicuous, that don't seem to bother us at all. So that's why they are pernicious and they are kind of dangerous because we don't see their harmfulness, whereas in the case of negative emotion, they make us suffer somehow. If we are very angry, if we are miserable, if we are depressed, all of that, there is an unpleasantness associated with them. So we try to get rid of them. And that's often the mistake because by trying to get rid of them right off the bat, instead of having the patience to trace them back to their origin which may be a 'me-belief' or a 'me-feeling', then we fail to reach the root cause of these negative emotions.

Q: Very interesting. I've never thought about the connection between negative emotion and a 'me-feeling' as a bodily sensation.

FL: Oh yes, because typically a negative emotion would be some kind of frustration and there is often a thought, and the thought will go along the lines, how did he or she dare do that to me? Or how did God dare or life dare do that to me? How did he or she dare say that to me or think that of me? In all these cases, there is 'me'. In frustration, there is a 'me'.

Q: Right, but 'me' is a concept.

Well, but then if we see this 'me-concept', it is not just free-floating in the air. It seems to have roots, experiential roots, in a sense of me in the body. And this sense of me can be localized, it can be localized sometimes in the head, sometimes in the throat, in the oesophagus, in the chest. These are bodily sensations that we have decided a long time ago that they were 'me'. And they are just bodily sensations. So the process of recovery, if you will, of liberation, is one in which we discriminate — that's the Indian word, you know, *viveka*, discrimination — between

the real me and the concepts in the case of beliefs, and the bodily sensations in the case of feelings, with which we, consciousness, identify.

These various types of objects with which we identify, they are called *vasanas* in the Indian tradition, are the memory of ignorance. They are the way ignorance perpetuates itself in the body-mind organism. So they have a component in the brain, and a component in the rest of the body in the form of bodily sensations. They have a psychological component and they have a somatic component, therefore feelings and beliefs.

But it's interesting to see the parallelism there is between feelings and beliefs. And generally speaking, whatever we understand on the level of thought or concepts has often a parallel to be found on the level of bodily sensations, and conversely. So when we discover something on one level, it's often interesting to try to investigate whether there is a symmetric element on the other level. Originally, to get established in our peace, in our true nature, we have to bring the light of discrimination into both of these areas.

[Francis Lucille, 27/4/2020 *Discriminating Sensation, Emotion, Feeling*]

The question arises: how should we deal with those negative emotions – is there anything we can do to be rid of them? The Direct Path approach is to welcome emotions, rather than suppress or sublimate them. In the following dialogue Francis explains what it really means to welcome emotions:

FL: A common mistake – and you see that being taught by all kinds of non-duality teachers, Advaita teachers – is to 'be with it, be with your anger'. But the student says, 'I don't like to be angry. It's unpleasant. Give me a way out of my anger. When that happens, in this moment, when it happens, give me a way out of my tension, out of my anger.' And this kind of teacher says, 'be with your anger'. And the student takes this advice as a way to liberate himself or herself from the situation. They don't like the situation. Be with your anger, welcome your anger. But the goal of this welcoming is to get rid of the anger. So it is the kind of welcoming like when someone comes to your house, you are at the entry door and you tell him, 'welcome, welcome', and you have a baseball bat behind your back. And as soon as they're inside, **'BIFF'**. So it's fake welcoming, like fake news. It's not real welcoming because you have to look at the intention. The intention is to get rid of it.

So if you ask me, what do I do when I'm angry like that? Because I find this unpleasant, I say, 'see that in fact you enjoy it'. Enjoy the ride. I mean, you are angry. It's great fun to be angry. It's like a child. You didn't do what your child wanted you to do. You didn't buy one more ice cream. He had already three! And you are at Disney World and he wants one more and you say 'no, now that's enough'. And then the child is sulking at you, angry, etc. And if in fact he knows or she knows that they are angry just for the sake of being angry, at some point they will give up being angry. But as long as they enjoy it, they enjoy being cross with you. If you fight with them, you give them the opportunity to keep the anger. The best thing you can do is to leave them alone. 'You already had three ice creams, you want one more – no, too bad'. You want to sulk? Sulk. Enjoy it. Enjoy your sulking. Be with it. Enjoy the taste of it, the colour of it, the sensation of it. See that you do it because you enjoy it. We are angry only because we enjoy anger. We have to recognize that. So if we enjoy anger, we may as well make good use of it. To enjoy it.

Q: Francis, with your answer, you make me angry again now. You see, you are clever. You try to bring one more [piece of] reasoning. My claim is, in heat of the moment, the reaction is faster than reasoning. You have no time to think: 'watch it again, and enjoy it'.

FL: My point is, don't try to manage the anger. That's the point. Because your question was, when I am angry, what do I do? And what I'm telling you is nothing. Do nothing.

Q: But at the end of the day, I would like to become master of myself. I don't want to be a slave of my reaction. I want to change my bad habit, old habit, with wisdom.

FL: When you really want to change it, you change it. That's the point you are not understanding; that you are angry because you want to be angry. You agree completely with your being angry. ...

Now, there are moments when you are not angry. When you are available. And there are moments when you are interested in what we are talking about here. And these are the productive moments or the transformative moments in which the sense of being a separate human being gets eroded, gets dismissed, forgotten. And we understand that what we really want is peace and absence of problems. We want to enjoy life in a different way. So these are the transformative moments and the outcome of that is that the episodes of anger will become less and less frequent.

[Francis Lucille, 20/11/2022 [Are You Fake Welcoming Negative Emotions – The Mistake of Saying 'Just Be With It'](#)]

Once we begin to be established in the non-dual understanding, these negative tendencies mostly drop away easily. But there may be some that persist. In the following dialogue, Francis explains how to respond to these when they come up:

Q: There are just some sticky things. What you said completely makes sense for most of these habitual mind patterns that I had, and they all subside and go away and do provide me with the peace that you talk about. It's just these few sticky things that I have been having a hard time processing, because they don't go away. I mean, they keep coming back, no matter how much of...

FL: But there is no need to engage with those. There is no need to start a fight, because if you start a fight, you create a fighter and you identify with a limited entity, with a limited fighter who is fighting these tendencies, these desires that are now deemed undesirable. But they are there. So if you fight them, if you want to get rid of them, no. Be with them, but be the truth about them. See that they take you in a direction in which you cannot find that which you truly desire. Or if you prefer, see that they are liars. They are lying to you. They are pretending to deliver some things they cannot deliver. And that's intelligence. That's understanding. And this understanding is based on your past experience because you have been down misery lane so many times in the past that by now you should know better.

Q: I should.

FL: But if you want to take this trip down misery lane one more time, it's a free country. There is no problem. Do it. Do it with your eyes open and do it again. Misery is my associate. I am the good cop. Misery is the bad cop. We are working together. Misery will bring you back to me.

[Francis Lucille, 21/2/2021, *The Beauty of Truth*]

Sometimes in the course of our spiritual investigation— either into beliefs in the mind, or into feelings and bodily sensations – deeper problems come to the surface. These may originate from childhood or from specific traumatic events. In the case of those on a spiritual path, the first step is to recognise I am not a separate entity. But beyond that, psychotherapeutic techniques may be

helpful to deal with habitual behaviours and addictions within the body-mind that have their origin in those past events.

Q: My question is about trauma, and whether that runs deep in the body, or is it a mind thing? ... Is this a scenario where solving the big problem takes care of the little problems, as I've heard you say before?

FL: I think in solving the big problem, if there are little problems from the past that need to find their resolution, they will come up in this process. If there are scars that need final healing, they will come up. If there are unresolved issues, they will come up. But to go to revisit the past in order to spot them out only reinforces ignorance. So because we are then the one who is having the issue, it reinforces this notion that there is a person there that needs to get rid of the trouble. And then by focusing on the tree, we lose sight of the forest. It is important first to go to the root of all psychological suffering, to address this. And then we can, if needed, and only if needed, in other words, if the opportunity presents itself, take care of their past trauma.

Because there is something about the past trauma which I think, that was missed by Freud. Freud was trying to find an origin for psychosis or for neurosis in a very specific moment in time, when the last straw broke the camel's back, so to speak. This child, as a punishment, was put in a closet, and he thought he would be left there to die, and it was unbearable. And as a result, the child pushed this event back into his subconscious. Down the road, after 10 years of therapy, all of a sudden, this event comes back to the surface, and having seen it, now the child is an adult, not afraid of being in the closet, and now the psychological issue is resolved.

Now, I'm not denying that this can happen, because actually it can happen. There are traumas that are of this kind. It's a very specific event, and the case in point, a woman who has been aggressed or raped, that is a very specific moment in time, and that could be an event, a trauma of this kind.

But in most cases, the cause of our psychological suffering is a quasi-constant exposure through early childhood to unawareness. So not being really loved, because only in wisdom can we be loved, but in unawareness, it's just the opposite. And the penetration by unawareness into the psyche of a young child and also into her body is more invisible. So that then there is not one single event that will come back to the surface, because there is no such single event. That which will come back will be bodily sensations and images in the mind that are irrational. And they will pass by some form of unpleasantness, some form of fear, some form of sense of lack, apparently more subdued, but in fact also very detrimental to our happiness.

So basically, what to do? The first thing, before you put out a fire, you switch off the gas line. That's what the fire brigades do. They switch off the gas line, because there is no point trying to put out a fire if you're still fuelling it. Because then if you stop fuelling it, the fire is going to end by itself sooner or later. Then you can try to use all kinds of devices to put it out sooner. The first prerequisite is to stop fuelling it. And that which fuels the fire of misery is every time we reinforce or we repeat the belief to be a separate person, the belief to be a man, to be a woman. That's the worst thing.

So in a sense, the real therapist is the one who knows that, because then she can go directly to the root cause of the problem and eventually, if needed, use the tools she has learned, that she has in the toolbox to put out some fires. But she knows that the most important thing is to cut, to stop fuelling the problem. So there are techniques that are useful, hypnosis and all kinds of things, yes, especially if you want to achieve a specific result like quit smoking or things like that.

But they remain within the mind. And as a result, they cannot liberate one from the deep existential fear, which is a result of unawareness.

[Francis Lucille, 28/7/2020 *The Real Me is Awareness*]

So it's the non-dual understanding of the therapist that is a pre-requisite for really solving the problem. Without that understanding, the therapist will also be suffering and will be unable to lead the client to a full resolution and real happiness. Here is some advice from Francis to someone who is an experienced psychotherapist but on coming to the Direct Path feels that what she learnt is no longer relevant for leading her clients to happiness:

FL: It's always the same thing. The patient comes, he wants happiness, he goes to the psychotherapist and the psychotherapist gives him something else than happiness, why? Because the psychotherapist himself or herself is not happy, so you can only give that which you have. If you don't have happiness in stock, you cannot give it to your customer. So that's a problem that most psychotherapists face.

Now, the good news is that when the psychotherapist is a truth lover, he has the goods, so he can deliver. So then the patient comes thinking to receive psychotherapy, but then he receives something else, which is happiness. That's good, and that's what cures.

So here are my final recommendations. When the patient arrives to you, even if he or she is very, very closed, very, very ignorant, still when they come to you, the beauty is that they have some hope. In other words, the only reason why they come to you is because they are expecting something better. And in this expectation, there is the implicit acknowledgement that they don't have the answer, otherwise they wouldn't come to you. When you don't have the answer, it means that there is a small window of openness: "I don't have the answer".

So this person who normally in her life or his life is very closed, there is an exception when they come to see you, there is a small window of openness because they don't have the answer. Now, if the therapist is established in this openness, it's like the open space, and when this open window is in front of the open space, then the open space enters the small window, and real communication, real understanding takes place. How does this happen? It will be given to you in the moment, itself. Perhaps you'll say nothing. Perhaps you'll say something. Perhaps you'll even say something that sounds like Carl Jung or Reich or Freud or Maslow or whoever. You say something that sounds like that, but in fact it's because you have caught the little window that you are entering in this way. It is not what you have learned, it is what you are that helps.

[Francis Lucille, 20/10/2013 *Advice to a Psychotherapist Truth Lover*]

Can non-dual psychotherapy be a pathway to spiritual understanding? It can in some cases, if the client is open to it. But in the beginning, it won't be a very direct path. In all cases, what is important is the freedom, adaptability, openness and receptivity of the therapist. Here is part of a dialogue I had with Francis on behalf of a psychotherapist friend who was studying with another Direct Path teacher, but wanted advice on how to make use of his understanding in his professional work:

FL: As a therapist, patients obviously come to him because they have a problem. Not because they seek the truth. They have a problem and the good thing about it is that they have a problem to which they don't have the solution. And because of that, there will be a level of openness in them. Now what is important to understand is that on the other side, on the side of the therapist, that which matters is not the technicality or the extent of the psychological knowledge of this therapist. Because if this therapist has done very brilliant research in psychology and has a PhD from a top-flight university and if he or she is miserable in their life,

they are not going to be much help to this patient who has a problem. So the real thing, that which is important in the therapist, is their level of freedom, their level of happiness, their level of inner peace. Because it's that which communicates itself to the patient to the extent that the patient is open to it.

There can be an extraordinary quasi-immediate transformation happening in a patient if there is this openness, and this patient will almost instantaneously turn into a truth seeker. But this type of event is going to be extremely rare. And then the therapy session will evolve into some kind of question and answers about 'what am I?'. It will be about consciousness, awareness, reality, life, death, the goal of life, etc. And that will happen naturally. If the therapist is established in this happiness and peace, that will happen in a very organic fashion. There is no need for any predefined strategy.

But in most cases that is not going to happen. Then it is the love, the compassion of the therapist that is going to achieve some kind of healing of the current wound and take the patient to the next level, open the patient to the next level. I wouldn't really tell the patient who comes to me because they have a problem with going into elevators – and that is a big problem because their office is on the 30th floor in the building – I wouldn't say, OK, I have the solution for you and it's to meditate with me. I'm not sure I would go down that road. I would be open and let the situation unfold, being completely open and be simply the witness of the answer I will give to the questions, or the body language that will send messages through my body without any preconceived intention, the way human beings communicate on many levels spontaneously, without applying predefined recipes.

I mean, it may be that an idea will come and then I will apply one of those tricks, yes, but the beauty of the interaction between the therapist and the patient is precisely the adaptability, the fact that what the therapist is going to say or not to say is decided in the moment, so it's custom-made for the situation, that's the beauty of it, and we all know that a custom-made garment always fits better than something which is picked out of the shelves of the rack in the department store.

[Francis Lucille, 26/12/2021, *Leaving a Relationship & Non-Dual Therapy*]

Finally, a brief mention of the role of body-yoga techniques that Francis teaches to help people who have repressed their bodily sensations, for example as a result of serious trauma:

Q: There are people who repress their sensation to a very large extent. Their emotions, their sensations, their sensitivity. Especially after a trauma or something. Is there a way to help?

FL: Well, the yoga we do normally should do the trick to awaken areas of the body that are kind of forgotten, when in pathological cases, you can even touch the area and it makes a person fear. So it starts with the skin, really with a tactile sense on the surface of the body. Make sure that, there are areas that are not very sensitive in the back, for instance. There are people who are not in touch with their body at all. And if you are not in touch with your body, you are not really in touch with your emotions.

There are people who are so afraid of pain that the slightest sensation which is beyond the range of normalcy, they reject it. And then they believe that they are hypersensitive, which is not the case. They are not sensitive. They repress their sensations, which is not the same. Someone who is sensitive is someone who allows for the sensation to appear. Not someone who resists. Or it's a different use of the adjective, sensitive.

And there are people, they don't even feel their emotions. They are lost. There is a kind of numbness. I think artistic activities are a good means to develop this sensitivity of the body because all the senses are connected to each other. So if you develop the tactile sense, you also develop the sense of hearing and the sense of sight, and conversely.

[Francis Lucille, Thanksgiving Retreat 2016, week 1, day 1]

Contemplation

Any technique or system keeps the person in the vicious circle, because it is trying to heal what is fundamentally an illusion. See that the person has created a universe around him of beliefs and ideas, and looks for techniques and systems to overcome insecurity.

[Jean Klein, *Transmission of the Flame*]