

LS Issues #4

Conversation between Dave, Jas and Nina Cristante outside Catania airport under an olive tree on 10th November 2019.

Dear Life Sport

Obviously you are not doctors, so I'm not looking for medical advice.
My question to you is, how do we best live with depression?

Thanks in advance, T.

Nina: I think the interesting thing about the question is the fact that they are not asking for medical advice. So, I'm thinking about what they might be asking for. They're asking how to best live *with* something rather than how to get rid of it, which is probably what you would normally ask a doctor. But it's also just a figure of speech, *living with depression*, isn't it?

Jas: Yeah

N: In my own experience, I had depressive periods but I don't have depression consistently. I have other mental health issues and I work very hard to get rid of them rather than living with them. I have a food disorder and I partly live with it but I also feel like I've overcome it by trying to get rid of it for so many years. Maybe that's what living *with* means. I have a positive way of thinking about it whereby I think I got rid of it but I'm probably living with it, that's why I still don't eat tomatoes.. but I've kind of made a nicer shape out of it, more rounded, so it feels softer within myself.

Dave: The question doesn't definitely say that they consider it a negative, it's more about optimizing, making it part of your life. Like the suitcase here, it's a weight I'm carrying but you can pack it badly or well. It seems we are presuming they are experiencing depression entirely as a negative and that they want to get rid of it.

J: What I find interesting about the question is that it's saying *we*, how do we best live with depression is suggestive of *we* as a collective. My understanding of depression and depressive episodes, is that a lot of people suffer from it individually but I understand it as something that affects *all*, and the question of how we best live with it is more of a question about the human condition. How do we collectively experience and deal with depression? It concerns all of us and that includes doctors, medication, therapies and our general understanding and interpretation.

D: But the doctors tell you that depression is bad and that's maybe why the question says *you're not doctors*. It might be implying that the person can't speak to doctors about how to live *with* depression because the doctor's idea is always to get rid of it.

N: Yes. This reminds me of something we discussed before, about how we consider sickness and illness as negative. First of all, they are part of life just as much as anything; happiness, health, etc. Secondly, when we are depressed, perhaps there is something outside of us that needs changing rather than that we need changing. Perhaps the expression of our depression is a representation of our descent. It represents a resistance to the status quo. That's why I don't really like medicine's idea of curing depression rather than thinking about all the things around someone's life that have created those feelings, which are as legitimate as any other feelings,

even if they are negative, or considered negative. When you feel depressed or sad, you give in to gravity.

D: Exactly, it's neither positive nor negative. When I felt depressive episodes, it's perhaps when I felt most whole. Most grounded.

N: The way I feel when I move is to try to go against gravity, or the feeling of being grounded. In the type of training I do, I often talk about the possibility of getting a body that is anti-gravity. I have a problem with feeling grounded generally. There is definitely a lack of being in moments of slowness or sadness for me, I tend to just go the opposite way.

J: I think that movement generally is the opposite of depression. It's impossible to feel that weight or gravity when you move. When someone asks for non-medical advice, and there are studies, I'd say that sport is more helpful than medication. If you do regular exercise it can have more effect than antidepressants because you release natural endorphins. Obviously pharma industries don't make money on people moving. Movement is something I would definitely suggest.

N: If the person asked for advice what to do to counteract depression, then I would suggest from my own experience: regular exercise, regular meals, almost in a ritualistic way, regularity and self-discipline. Depression affects your sleeping pattern, so you are more drowsy in the day and irritable and kind of off-set in a metabolic sense, that's why I would suggest regularity to fight it. However, if the person instead feels whole when they're experiencing depression, as Dave mentioned, and they want to experience it fully without it being an obstruction in their daily life then it becomes more complicated for me. Because it goes really against how I function, I wouldn't know how to function in a depressive state. It becomes very difficult for me to leave the bed and the self-loathing is overwhelming, and this feeling of heaviness stops me from moving, speaking to people, working or doing anything. If it's a more consistent state throughout their life, this might be different.

J: I also automatically assume that one doesn't want to live with depression but that it's a question of how to integrate it and make it work best for you, how to accept that it's there. It's a condition that also goes beyond just the self but it's really a human condition, and how do we live with it and incorporate it in our life and society and productivity. It's a problem of medicine as well that you're being told that it's an isolated problem, throwing it back on the individual, like *you* deal with it and when you are better you can join us again in being productive and doing the things we're doing.

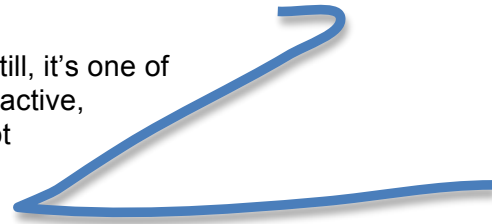
N: I completely agree. It makes me think of Mark Fisher. If society is depressed or if people are depressed because of society, I think you need to keep up all the self-care routines that you have developed, trusting your own agency and your own body while you also keep a really strong political mind and try to actually change society as a whole. I think there has to be a vision of how we want things to change for the better and suit society, while you do all this stuff for yourself.

J: Yes, utilising self care as a catalyst for change on a larger scale opposed to just getting yourself better and fitting back into society as it is.

N: Yes, I think that is more exciting. It shouldn't be to just make the problem about you but society as a whole. For example, I started to bring political and environmental issues into my therapy sessions opposed to just speaking about my personal stuff. How is it possible that everyone is suffering? There seems to be an epidemic of mental health issues and it's important to recognise that they might not

just be happening in these individual islands but that the problem is the world as a whole.

D: Maybe depression is a bit like stillness. It's really hard to be still, it's one of the hardest things, I find. We are always taught to move and be active, which is important, but the opposite is also important. We are not taught to be still and that's possibly where a conflict occurs, that we are constantly trying to force ourselves out of the stillness. What we should do is learn the stillness.



J: That really resonates because I think a lot of negative emotions, and that's from my own experience, need to be really felt through in order for them to go. Instead, we cover them up, distract ourselves and try to move on somehow. I feel that the only cure for any negative feeling really is to feel it through till the end and that requires stillness as you just described. Sitting in a room just with that feeling and *feel* it, no matter how long it takes, until you come out of it and there's a chance that you have overcome it and find freedom on the other side.

N: I have this major problem of not being able to feel the feeling. I'm hyperkinetic, I can't stay still, I can't believe I'm even meditating twice a day. I achieved that because it's for a foreseeable time period, it's 20 minutes and then I'm done with it. But it's very hard for me to not move at all physically, and it's the same for my feelings. As soon as my body or mind hits a point of sadness, for example I feel a tear coming up, my body and mind just deflect into a different feeling, that can be fear, anxiety, anger. Those are all collateral expressions of the real sadness that is living. Feeling existential, it's very hard. My therapist said, remember that sitting with it, being with it, won't kill you. I know this sounds silly but trust me Nina, it won't kill you. At the worst it's going to be painful but it won't kill you, so don't be scared of dying because you are feeling.

J: Yes, we won't die of feeling.

N: Exactly. It brings us back to the idea that we are scared of dying. You are scared of going too deep into that feeling, and you might be feeling so depressed that you want to kill yourself.

D: Except those that have already died, like near-death experience.

N: Yeah, except those that already died.

J: It's really interesting having these two ideas of either stillness and feeling the feeling through, or movement which could be considered a way of avoiding, but maybe not, maybe it's just what we are supposed to do. Applying this to how we have evolved as a species, we used to be nomadic and always moving. Those living a nomadic lifestyle might not have the issue of depression because their existence is more about survival, constant adaptation and change. Staying in one place, I tend to get really down after a while. I doubt we are supposed to be static.

N: Maybe you can be still in the mind and still keep moving. I wouldn't describe any of us in this circle as happy. I think we are very intense. I don't know how you feel but I don't look in life for happiness, I look for intensity, I look for wholeness, I look for stillness even, it's more attractive to me than the term happiness or content. None of us are settling for being content and happy. The opposite of depression is not necessarily happiness. When you mention nomadic lifestyles, people living this way probably express their feelings a lot. I think there is something about depression that is not necessarily sadness but it's a muffling, a heaviness of not expressing. They

say depression is a repression of anger. That anger maybe needs to come out. It may come out in extreme stillness.

D: Even in a nomadic lifestyle, or the fantasy of it, you don't always move. You stop and rest. You stop start. You need both.

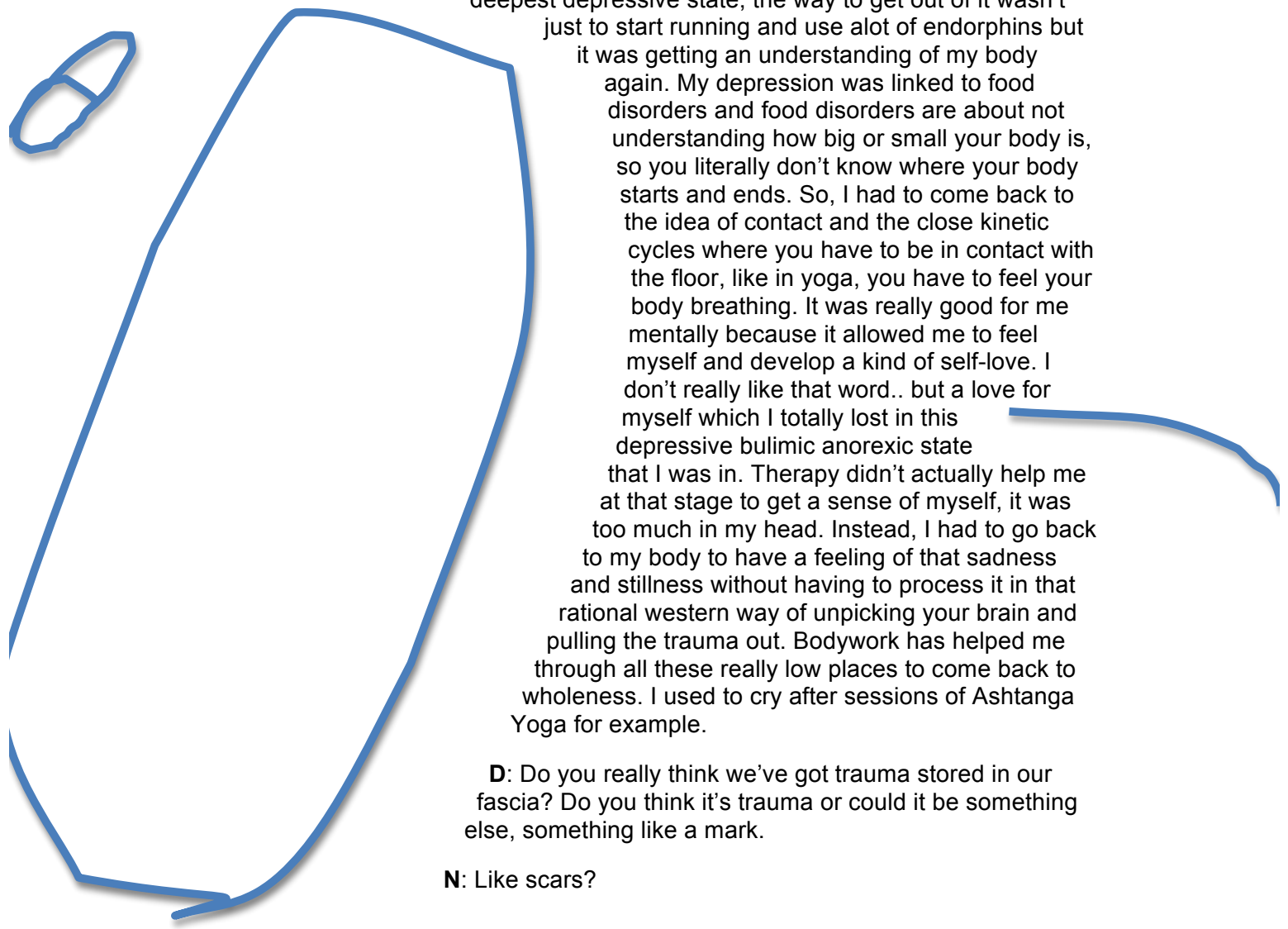
J: Yes. In the last few years, I learned alot from my chronic pain condition. Before I could do everything, I could travel and move and I could change my environment. The pain really struck me down, I had to literally lie on the floor, for hours sometimes, just to be ok. It was so painful and I didn't know what was wrong. Stretching, using massage balls and fascia rollers and all that stuff to release brought up alot of emotions. I also experienced visuals in certain pain spots and movements, taking me back to places and specific situations, sometimes from years ago, all stored in my body. I had to process all of them, I couldn't just move on like I used to but was forced to look there, things I had forgotten or didn't consider important at the time. Only in retrospect and through physical pain, I felt these things through. It's almost like I had to develop a physical break to stop myself from moving on and instead having to go there mentally, because I wasn't prepared to at the time.

N: Yes, there is so much trauma stored in the fascia. I have been doing these trauma release exercises that deal with stored emotions in the body. In my

deepest depressive state, the way to get out of it wasn't just to start running and use alot of endorphins but it was getting an understanding of my body again. My depression was linked to food disorders and food disorders are about not understanding how big or small your body is, so you literally don't know where your body starts and ends. So, I had to come back to the idea of contact and the close kinetic cycles where you have to be in contact with the floor, like in yoga, you have to feel your body breathing. It was really good for me mentally because it allowed me to feel myself and develop a kind of self-love. I don't really like that word.. but a love for myself which I totally lost in this depressive bulimic anorexic state that I was in. Therapy didn't actually help me at that stage to get a sense of myself, it was too much in my head. Instead, I had to go back to my body to have a feeling of that sadness and stillness without having to process it in that rational western way of unpicking your brain and pulling the trauma out. Bodywork has helped me through all these really low places to come back to wholeness. I used to cry after sessions of Ashtanga Yoga for example.

D: Do you really think we've got trauma stored in our fascia? Do you think it's trauma or could it be something else, something like a mark.

N: Like scars?



D: Scars always seem to imply something negative. So does trauma. Maybe through our lives we create these marks and maybe they are buttons that we can press to access something we need. We just don't know this stuff, we haven't gone there and don't fully understand it. I'm not sure they are trauma or scars. I think we have to stop always applying negative terms to these things that happened to us. I believe in the fascia as an organ that keeps and holds things. They are perhaps marks, buttons or triggers that we don't understand but that are there for us to use.

J: In my case, they feel like knots and they are painful. I've always had a negative association with pain, that it is something to be avoided and that you want to get rid of it.

N: Now we go back to the idea of maybe having to live with pain and that it is not only negative. If we analyse what pain is, it's a neurological response to address our attention to a part. So, if we think of pain as buttons, it makes our attention go there and that doesn't necessarily have to be seen as negative even though it feels terrible. It's just your brain telling you to look there. It's similar to feelings, you don't want to go there and escape the feeling instead of feeling the painful feeling.

D: I have lived pain through Jas and I also had my own pains. Where does it start and where does it stop? When does your mind go to it and when doesn't it go to it? When do you allow it to be there and when don't you allow it? These are the things we really don't understand. How to use pain.

J: Yes, and that's a larger problem really. We are brought up to believe we have to get rid of pain. Whether it's emotional pain, like depression, or a physical sensation. We learn that pain is bad from a young age and that makes us really afraid and weak. I think we don't live our full potential because of that fear of pain. It creates a block or barrier trying to avoid it. I don't mean that we should all suffer in a religious way, like the suffering of Christ, but obviously a tolerance of pain is missing in current society.

N: I agree. This brings us back to the idea of wholeness. To avoid pain is to avoid a huge part of life. If you want to avoid pain, you avoid love aswell. I have been in so much in pain because of love, and there is no way those two things are not related for me. Being scared of pain is being scared of loving aswell.

J: You can't have the good without the bad.

N: Yes, but there are ways of integrating it without this duality maybe, and that's what Dave is suggesting with the ideas of marks instead of scars.

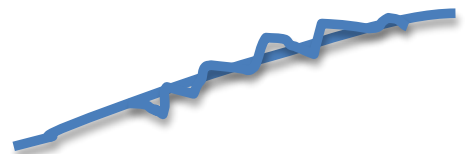
J: There is definitely pleasure in pain.

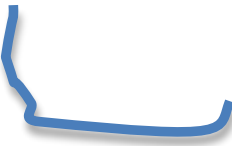
N: There is some grounding in it I feel.

D: That's why the kids cut themselves.

J: Yes, it's to put the emotions in the body. For me, my brain put the pain in my body, because my brain wasn't dealing with it. If the body shuts down and you can't do anything, you can't distract and you can no longer escape, then you have to deal with it.

N: I always described my inside as mould. There is something within myself that is mouldy, if it's not Candida it's something else mouldy growing inside me that represents all the bits I hate about myself, my inner child. I try to hide it all the time, really deep down inside my organs, so no one can see it and I don't have to deal with





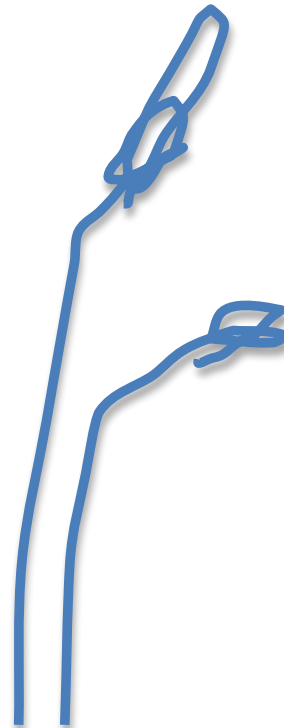
it. It feels like a parasite. Through therapy and my own journey and process, I have been able to take this mouldy child and clean it up a bit. Making it part of me and mine rather than it being a parasite that's intruding my wellbeing. It's for me about integrating it, instead of hiding. Also in front of other people. It's the same for depression, living with it instead of hiding, the problem is that we keep it hidden.

J: How do we best deal with depression? As a collective we are not dealing with it very well. We prescribe stuff to make it go away and feel better. The question is why do we want to get rid of it? If it's to keep people productive and functioning in society, then maybe there is something wrong with that machine, and we need to look at why so many people are depressed and cannot or don't want to function in that way. Maybe we shouldn't. Depression forces a break from that.

N: Exactly, I feel it needs to be shared and understood and the more people know that we all feel similar, the more change can happen in society, so I think it shouldn't be hidden but transparent and expressed. Even the word depression implies a condensing. I think it is beautiful if we can talk about it and understand that we feel similar. And integrate it! We can rewire how something is considered. We don't have to be happy and grateful to be alive. How we feel is part of the human condition, and we need to think about how we can make society better in a political sense whilst dealing with the human condition.

J: Yes. I also think gluten is a bit the problem. We stopped moving and being nomadic with the birth of agriculture. Gluten glues our fascia together, wheat makes us depressed.

N: Haha, that's a good ending.



LS Issues is a series of questions that we try to answer.

Previous LS Issues on lifesport.gr