

The 'Happiness Trap'

The last of the five sheaths, *anandamaya*, is the sheath of happiness. At first sight, this seems paradoxical since happiness is the goal of the spiritual path. In the *Introduction to Presence: The Art of Peace and Happiness*, Rupert explains what usually happens in our search for happiness:

The spiritual search is usually undertaken as a result of the failure of the search to secure happiness, peace and love in the conventional realms of experience. Instead of happiness, which seems to be available only in fleeting glimpses, we now seek a permanent state of enlightenment. In fact, our search for enlightenment is simply a rebranding of the conventional search for happiness.

This search takes us to new realms of experience, tending to focus on the acquisition of states of mind rather than objects or relationships in the world. And just as the acquisition of an object or relationship puts a temporary end to the conventional search, giving us a brief taste of happiness, so these newly acquired states of mind bring the spiritual search to a temporary end, again giving us a glimpse of the same happiness, which we now call awakening or enlightenment. However, just as we previously mistook the acquisition of objects and relationships for the source of happiness, so we now confuse these new states of mind for enlightenment.

However, these brief glimpses, like the previous moments of happiness, are soon eclipsed by the old patterns of seeking happiness, peace and love in objects, relationships and states. As a result, we are again faced with the failure of our search, only this time there are no more possible realms in which to search. Like the prodigal son, we have ventured into a 'far-off country' seeking happiness and we have now exhausted all its possibilities.

This is where the Direct Path starts – with the recognition that the ever-present happiness we are seeking cannot be found in objects of any kind, including 'spiritual' states of mind. (Annex A explains the true role of the traditional methods of meditation.) It comes to the surface only when the separate self with all its desires and aversions has been seen to be non-existent. Here is a further explanation of the difference between the happiness that is inherent in our true nature, and the state of the mind that we call 'happiness':

RS: It's the difference between the patch of blue sky that you see between the clouds, and the full blue sky itself. In other words, the patch of blue sky appears to have a *limit* to it. We say 'look, it's just a little patch of blue ...' It has a limit in size and shape. It's not actually the sky that is limited, it's not the blue sky that is limited. It's the clouds that are limited. But they seem to limit the sky. So there's no such thing as a '*state* of happiness'. When we experience happiness, the mind and the body are relieved of a tension – the mind expands, and the body relaxes. And that's very pleasant, there's a pleasant sensation in the body, and the mind expands and relaxes. That's very pleasant. But those are the *effects* of happiness on the body/mind. They are usually mistaken for happiness. Most people think that happiness is a pleasant sensation or a pleasant state of mind. That would be a '*state* of happiness' in the body or the mind. It's not really happiness – it's a sensation or an expanded state.

But it's true that when the separate self dissolves in its source, when the separate self is revealed as the true self of awareness, when it is divested of its limitations, in other words when we taste happiness, there is a kind of 'letting go' in the body and the mind. There is a release of tension which is sometimes expressed as laughter or tears, but it doesn't need to be expressed in that way. But there is a release of tension, and that is very pleasant. But it's just an after-effect – it's nothing to do with happiness itself. [Rupert Spira: Dorset Retreat 1/12/2014]

It is common for those on the spiritual path to experience causeless happiness or ecstatic states from time to time, and it is often suggested that 'progress' can be measured by the frequency and duration of those states. Although this does seem to be true for some people, it is not universal. Moreover, it would be a mistake to imagine that enlightenment involves the expansion of these states to fill all the gaps in between so that life becomes one continuous state of peace and happiness. Enlightenment is the discovery that the real peace and happiness we are looking for lies *underneath* all the various states of mind and body – pleasant or unpleasant, agitated or calm, fearful or confident. It has always been there, never leaves us and never changes. As Francis Lucille explains, trying to get more of these experiences or trying to get back to something resembling a previous experience is the trap of *anandamaya*:

Sometimes I experience ecstatic or very peaceful states, but they do not last, and the rest of my life seems bland and uninteresting by comparison.

You feel that things need to be changed. You feel that things are not satisfactory as they are, that they are not unfolding as they should. Don't worry about things. Although these states, these *samadhis*, have a mystical quality to them, they are objective experiences. They are very refined objects, but nevertheless they are still objects. They are traps. Just as, on the path of knowledge, powers or *siddhis* are at some point a trap, so also are *samadhis*. *Siddhis* are the active part of the trap and *samadhis* are the passive part. *Samadhis* are the last layer of ignorance, *anandamayakosha*, the layer of the illusion of bliss. If we are attached to bliss, we kill bliss. As William Blake said, "He who binds himself to a joy does the winged life destroy."

I had an experience thirty years ago in which I was blissfully happy, everything was so vibrant, but it vanished and I have never experienced it again.

It takes time to understand that the happiness in a happy state never comes and goes. Whatever was happy in that happy state thirty years ago, is still present right now. It is happiness itself. You objectified it and attached it to an experience that happened thirty years ago. To be hypnotized by the past prevents us from being knowingly this happiness in the present. Understand that the perfume of this experience is still present. It has never left you. In fact it is precisely because it has never left you, that you keep thinking about it.

[*The Perfume of Silence, ch7: God is Very Mischievous*]

It is common practice in some spiritual groups to encourage the sharing of these types of positive experience. This is unhelpful not only because it leads to the objectification of such experiences, but also because it encourages the development of 'spiritual ego'. In a continuation of the dialogue above, Francis Lucille explains the attitude we need to have towards these experiences:

I have had other experiences in which everything is not vibrantly happy but peacefully happy, and everything just flows. There is no feeling of restlessness or ego. I was just referring to that particular one because it was so vibrant.

Nevertheless, the moment we see happiness as an objective experience after the fact, we make an object of it and want it to reappear in an identical manner. However, this will never happen because it is always different. On the other hand, it is manifesting itself all the time. We cannot tell happiness where and how to manifest itself. God knows best what we need, where to appear, when to appear, and how to appear.

The one who refers to these past experiences is the one who still has the nostalgia. It is the same illusion. That which remains when this illusion is seen for what it is, is God.

It is important not to identify with past experiences, especially with past spiritual experiences. On the whole one should refrain from talking about them or even thinking about them. Every time we think of such an experience, we should immediately understand that the happiness that was present then, is still present now. Use it as a means of coming back to the present, of forgetting the past. Otherwise we create an ego that allegedly had these experiences and, the bigger the experience, the bigger the ego.

The truth we are referring to is peace. It is an absence of problems. It is the true background. It doesn't have this vibrancy, this extraordinary knowledge. It manifests it, but it is not it. This expanded state of consciousness appears in the Self, in peace. It is a different mode of knowing. It is unusual but it is not the source. The source is beyond all of that and is always present.

If we focus our mind on these big experiences, it prevents us from seeing the leaf on the tree, the problem in our neighbour's heart, the sky, the stars, the sun dancing on the wallpaper in our room, and so on—all these little things that tell us about God. Krishnamurti used to say that if we want it big, we don't really want the divine. We cannot see how divine the hills and the mountains are, so we want an angel with wings on top of them.

[The Perfume of Silence, ch7: God is Very Mischievous]

In summary:

Q: Do you have a comment about finally resting in lasting Happiness?

RS: There is no question of resting in happiness. There is no separate 'I' to rest in happiness. Happiness is another name for Awareness. It is what you are. It is not a feeling of any kind.

Likewise, do not look for lasting happiness. Happiness does not last in time. Happiness is timeless.

[\[http://non-duality.rupertspira.com/read/freedom_from_suffering_173\]](http://non-duality.rupertspira.com/read/freedom_from_suffering_173)

Contemplation

Happiness, which is the simple knowing of our own Being as it essentially is, is not dependent on the conditions of the body, mind or world. It is our ever-present nature. It lies shining quietly in the background of all experience and, when it is recognized, overflows into the foreground, pervading all experience with its qualities. [Rupert Spira]

Annex: Traditional and Direct Path Meditation

Mantra meditation is designed to take us to a state of *nirvikalpa samadhi* or 'consciousness without objects', and this state often results in pleasant sensations in the body and an expanded state of mind. Experience of consciousness without objects is for most people a necessary step in recognising their true identity as pure consciousness. But as Rupert explains, this consciousness that we know ourselves to be, with its inherent qualities of peace and happiness is equally present with or without objects:

... [A concentrative method of meditation e.g. using a mantra, breath etc.] withdraws the mind from what seems to be a multiplicity and diversity of objects to a single object.

As the focus of attention relaxes, this one object fades in intensity and ultimately disappears altogether, leaving only its source and substance, Consciousness, present and aware of itself alone, just as the fading of an image on a screen leaves only the screen, which is realised to be both the support and the substance of the image.

That which is giving attention, Consciousness, and that which is receiving attention, Being, are now realised to be one and the same. Consciousness realises its own Self. It knows its own Being.

This timeless, non-objective experience of Consciousness knowing its own Being is, in the Indian tradition, known as *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*, sometimes described as an absorption in a state where no objects are present.

However, such an interpretation by the mind of a 'state', in which it was by definition not present, can be misunderstood. There is in fact no personal entity present, let alone 'absorbed,' in this timeless, non-objective experience. It is the *absence* of a 'person', but the *presence* of Consciousness.

This timeless, non-objective experience is the experience of Consciousness knowing itself directly as transparent, luminous Presence, prior to and independent of the mind or body. It is also known as peace and happiness. That is, it is the revelation of causeless peace or happiness that is itself the experience of Consciousness knowing its own Being. In other words, in this timeless, non-objective experience, Consciousness ceases to veil itself by taking the shape of a thought which identifies itself (Consciousness) exclusively with a body and comes, as a result, to 'taste' the peace and happiness that is inherent in its own nature. It sees its own face.

When the mind and the body reappear after this 'absorption,' the personal entity which they seem to constitute, imagines that it, 'I', this personal entity, was present *in* this peaceful, happy state. By comparison to this state, the world of objects is deemed problematic and a desire to return to the transparent, presence of Consciousness initiates a new round of seeking, that is, a new round of rejecting the current appearance of objects.

In other words, the peace and happiness that are inherent in the non-objective experience of Consciousness knowing its own Being, seems to be lost 'on coming out of' this absorption.

It is only a deeper exploration of our experience that reveals that Consciousness is in fact equally present and aware *during* the presence of objects as it is in their *absence* and, moreover, that the objects of the body, mind and world have no inherent power to disturb or obscure this peace and happiness.

This absorption without objects, or Consciousness' direct knowing of its own Being, is sometimes known as Awakening or Enlightenment. The subsequent stabilisation of this understanding in all realms of experience (the mind, body and world) is sometimes known as Self-realisation.

Having said all that, the practise of concentration that leads, in some cases, to Consciousness becoming aware of itself in its own freedom and independence, is not what is being recommended here.

In fact, it is rather the opposite: That element of our experience which is best known and most loved is Consciousness itself. Whenever we desire peace, happiness or love, it is this presence of Consciousness that is, as it were, longing for its own Self.

Once it has become clear through direct experience that this Consciousness that we intimately and directly know ourselves to be, is ever-present and independent of objects (whether or not these objects are appearing) there is no longer any need to try to get rid of these objects by any focussing of the attention.

If anything it is a relaxation rather than a focussing of the attention. However, it should be emphasised that this relaxation is brought about naturally, effortlessly and spontaneously through understanding rather than through any effort or discipline of the mind.

Only an object can be concentrated upon and Consciousness is not an object. Moreover, Consciousness is ever-present and is therefore available to itself, as it were, at every single moment, irrespective of the particular characteristics of that moment.

Once it has been seen clearly that we are already and always Consciousness itself, and that the Consciousness we intimately and directly know ourselves to be is the Presence in which all appearances of the mind, body and world appear, then we simply take our stand knowingly as this Presence.

This Presence that we are is like an open, loving space which welcomes all things impartially into itself. Whether we know it or not, we are that, but now we take our stand there knowingly. Not we, a person, an entity, but rather 'I', [or] 'We' take our stand in and as our Self, as we are, this Knowing Presence.

If, however, we still feel that we are a separate entity we can simply offer or surrender every appearance of the mind, body and world to this open, loving Presence. If we know ourselves to be this Presence we can simply welcome all appearances within our Self, without agenda. Surrendering or offering is, for the 'person', what welcoming is for Presence. They amount to the same thing, because in surrendering or offering all appearances, the separate self, the primal object, is itself offered up.

As we take our stand as this Knowing Presence it becomes clearer and clearer, usually over a period of time, that we are not just the background, the witness of all experience but also its substance. In the path of wisdom or discrimination we come to know ourselves as 'nothing', that is, no-thing, non-objective Knowing Presence prior to and independent of the mind, body and world. In the path of love we come to know ourselves as everything, the substance of all things.

[\[http://non-duality.rupertspira.com/read/is_concentration_necessary_for_enlightenment\]](http://non-duality.rupertspira.com/read/is_concentration_necessary_for_enlightenment)

In the Direct Path, meditation is possible all the time under all circumstances. It can take us to *nirvikalpa samadhi* but it can also be present during all of the activities of life – *sahaja samadhi*. As Rupert says 'true meditation never ends'.