

'Sweet are the uses of adversity'

*Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head;
And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in every thing.*

(William Shakespeare. *As You Like It*: Act II scene1)

Are peaceful, happy circumstances necessary for self-enquiry? In the 2016 World Yoga Festival, Rupert discussed practising self-enquiry when facing difficult situations, and explained how they can be a help rather than a hindrance:

Q: When I go through difficult moments in my life it's difficult for me to ask these kinds of questions.

RS: Why is it difficult to ask these questions when life gets difficult? My first teacher, Shantananda Saraswati used to tell the story of a woman called Kunti who prayed for adversity. She prayed to God for adversity and said to him 'the reason I pray for adversity is because it is only in adversity that I remember You'. Why do difficulties in your life make it impossible for you to ask these questions? Turn it around. Use the difficulties in your life to bring these questions into focus. The reason there are difficulties in your life is because you have ignored the experience of being aware. Use your suffering to encourage you to deeply investigate where happiness lies. Be thankful for the suffering because it intensifies your investigation.

When you say 'I am suffering', instead of trying to relieve that suffering, through the acquisition of objects, substances, activities, states of mind and relationships, investigate this self, the I that is suffering. What is it in my experience that is truly worthy of the name 'I'? What has remained with me throughout all circumstances, all situations, at all times? Only that is worthy of the name 'I'. What is that? And is that one suffering? Does the screen ever suffer the fate of the characters in the movie? The screen is totally open to everything that takes place in the movie. It doesn't have to defend itself against any experience. Awareness is like the space of this room; it cannot be harmed by experience.

At any moment of experience, if you ask yourself 'is what I essentially am harmed or hurt or stained by the current experience?', the answer is always 'no'. The current experience flows through you and it leaves you in the same pristine condition – you, Awareness. See that. See it clearly. Understand it. Feel it. And then you never have to defend yourself. You don't have to lock yourself up into an ivory tower – the witnessing presence of consciousness over in the background of experience, somewhere. You can go out into experience. You can have a job, you can have a family. You can go anywhere that your character takes you in life, because you know that what you essentially are is intimately one with all experience, and yet absolutely free of it. You are safe everywhere.

Q: OK – I don't really know how to do that.

RS: You can't do it. You have to see it clearly or understand it. What does the space of this room have to do in order to make itself unharmable? Does the space continually have to work at protecting itself from everything that takes place? I mean, imagine for instance if we were all to stand up now and start dancing or even fighting. What would the space have to do to protect

itself? Would it have to practise mantra meditation in order to protect itself from being harmed by all the activity in the room? Or would it just be totally open to what is going on, because of this deep knowledge that it has: 'I cannot be touched, and yet I touch everything intimately. I cannot be hurt or harmed or stained by what takes place in this room so I have no need to defend myself against it. I can be totally open to it'. It is not something the space *does* – it is what it *is*. You, Awareness, are already totally open to all experience. You don't have to add anything to awareness to make it open and imperturbable. That is its nature. What I mean is, that is *your* nature. Just see that.

[July 2016: [You are Safe Everywhere](#)]

When we feel unhappy, we imagine that our suffering is caused by some person, event or circumstances. But if we look carefully, we find that ultimately it is caused by our resistance. Rupert explains how to go about seeing this clearly and feeling it completely:

There are basically two approaches to suffering. Some of us are more inclined towards one rather than the other. But I recommend, to be really thorough, experimenting with both. One is the vedantic way and one is the tantric way. The first is to explore the self, the 'I', that is suffering. The reason for your suffering, in this approach, is not given any attention – it's the self that is suffering. Because whatever the innumerable causes of our suffering, it's always the same self, it's always 'me' that is suffering. So in this approach we go directly to that me, to the 'I' around whom our suffering is revolving: What is the nature of this 'I' – this suffering 'I'?

... The primary qualities of 'I' are 'am aware'. I am aware, being aware. So this aware 'I' is suffering. But why is this aware 'I' suffering. It's because it has mistaken itself, it has overlooked its essential nature. It has mixed itself up with what it is aware of. So instead of 'I' just referring to the experience of being aware, 'I' instead refers to what we are aware of, in other words, a cluster of thoughts and feelings. So it's this mixing up of 'I', awareness, with this cluster of thoughts and feelings that creates the suffering 'I', the separate, suffering 'I'. ...

The I of awareness doesn't share the limits of what it is aware of. So in this process of self-abidance or self-investigation, the 'I' liberates itself from its own superimposed limitations. ... That 'being aware' cannot suffer because it cannot offer any resistance to experience. It's like the empty space of this room – there's nothing in it with which it can resist. So that is a very powerful approach to suffering. ... It disregards the particular qualities of the feelings, and just goes directly to the nature of the suffering self, 'I'.

The other approach – and this is given more preference in the tantric traditions – is to go in the opposite direction. You go *totally* towards the feelings, you open yourself *completely* to the feelings. You go on opening yourself to the feeling until you can honestly say that there's no resistance in you to the feeling. It's a turning towards the feeling rather than a turning away from it ... – and this takes time, very often, because the first thing we want to do with our uncomfortable feelings is to get rid of them. That's not being open to our feelings – that's the opposite, that's trying to get rid of them. So the test of whether or not we are truly open to our feelings, is this question: we have to be able to ask of ourselves 'can I live with this feeling forever? If this uncomfortable feeling were to remain with me forever, would I be OK with that?'. If the answer is 'yes', we know that we are totally open to our feelings. But if the answer is 'no', it means there is still some resistance, we're still pushing the feeling away. ... And when you can answer yes to that question 'can I live with this feeling forever?', the next question to ask yourself is 'where is my suffering now?'. ...

Don't superimpose a kind of absolute non-dual 'there's nobody here, we shouldn't be practising'. All that is just the ego appropriating the non-dual teaching in order to perpetuate itself, and in doing so it shuts off the only avenue through which it can find the happiness it seeks. So if it takes time, take the time. If it seems you have to make an effort, make the effort.

[24th April 2015 [Two Approaches to Suffering](#)]

Rupert makes a distinction between physical pain and psychological suffering. The first step in dealing with physical pain is to do what you can to determine the cause and alleviate it.

Q: Sometimes (physical) pain can be so intense, but at the same time I feel I don't want that, and I try to go to awareness – awareness of the pain. But it doesn't go away when I do that.

RS: Physical pain is different from psychological suffering. It is natural to move away from physical pain. That's the purpose of physical pain. ... Pain is an intelligent signal of the body. ... You do your best in whatever way you are inclined, to alleviate the pain – conventional medicine or alternative medicine or whatever is appropriate.

[Buckland Hall retreat 24th November 2016: *There is intelligence in our suffering*]

When you have done everything you can, from a medical and practical perspective, the technique of exploring sensations explained in Rupert's yoga meditations can be helpful. He describes it as 'surrendering the burning sensation of pain to the coolness of awareness'.

People sometimes imagine that all illnesses are caused by egoic thoughts in the mind arising from a belief in being a separate self. They then suffer psychologically through feeling they are to blame for their illness. But as Rupert explains, this is not true:

Q: To what extent are diseases in the body the result of the belief in a separate self?

RS: The feeling of separation can and does lead to anxiety and fear and tension. And anxiety and fear and tension do have a profound effect on the body, and can turn into illness. But that *doesn't* mean that all illness is the result of the feeling of separation. ... Jesus was crucified, Ramana Maharshi died of cancer, the Buddha died of food poisoning, Nisargadatta died of cancer. They must all have been profoundly ignorant! ...

[Buckland Hall retreat 24th November 2016: *There is intelligence in our suffering*]

Much of our suffering is caused by conflicts in relationships. This is part of Rupert's answer to someone who asked about the practical application of the teaching to difficulties in daily life:

So much of our life is taken up by relationship of one sort or another. And in so many of our relationships there is a degree of conflict. So if, for instance, we find ourselves in some form of conflict, in any kind of relationship, rather than trying to change the other in order to bring about a resolution to the conflict, we first ask ourselves: 'who am I representing, on whose behalf are my thoughts and feelings and my subsequent activities rising in relation to this person?' 'Am I speaking on behalf of the presence of awareness or am I speaking on behalf of the fears and desires and insecurities and demands of a separate self?'. And if we find that our thoughts and feelings and our subsequent activities are representing the demands and insecurities and fears of the separate self, in that moment, we should investigate the self on whose behalf our thoughts and feelings are being represented, rather than trying to manipulate the other to fall in line with the demands of the separate self. So that would be a very good example in a relationship.

And also the way we think about another in a relationship, particularly in a situation where there is conflict. Am I relating to this person with the deep feeling-understanding that what they

essentially are, irrespective of the content that they bring me, irrespective of the thoughts and feelings that they are expressing, in our communication? Am I both knowing and feeling that this person is the same essential, unlimited self that I am? Is that my deep feeling in relationship to this person, or am I thinking and feeling of them as an irritating person, or someone who I feel is not speaking the truth, or is not being reasonable, or is not being just etc.? So if we are primarily relating to a person with whom we are conflict, if we are thinking of them just as a person, just as a collection of thoughts and feelings, and try to manipulate those thoughts and feelings in line with our own demands, we should pause. We should evoke, first of all, what we essentially are, and then feel – not just understand, but feel that the other is that same open, empty, transparent, unlimited presence. And then allow that feeling-understanding to condition our subsequent relationship with them. It doesn't mean that we necessarily smile sweetly at them. There may be a difficult situation to discuss with them. But the discussion is informed by our knowledge of that person as ourself. And that will profoundly affect the quality of our relationship. And it is in this understanding that all conflicts between people are eventually resolved. So this would be an example of where this understanding has a very practical implication in everyday life.

[Buckland Hall retreat, 9th December 2017: *Becoming Sensitive to Suffering*]

It is through applying the teaching in this way that the teaching takes root in us and the peace of our true nature is reflected in all aspects of our lives. Rupert gave this advice in response to a question about becoming established in our true nature, and the attitude and approach we should take towards challenging situations:

Given your love of truth, given your deep desire to be fully established in your true nature, to lead a life that is totally consistent at all levels with your understanding, then there are things we can do to cooperate and hasten the process. The yoga meditations are one such thing – they are like time in the lab, ... they are somewhere between time in the classroom and everyday life. ... The yoga meditations are a preparation for everyday life. But at some point, we have to take these yoga meditations out into everyday life and consider every moment a yoga meditation and an opportunity to live this understanding fully in all realms of experience. ...

If you were never sent situations like this, in other words, if your life was always easy and peaceful, how would you know you were unshakeably established in your true nature? Remember when Atmananda Krishnamenon was asked 'what are the best circumstances for spiritual practice?' and he said the police force or the military. Because if you can remain established in your true nature in the police force or the military then you'll remain in your true nature in any circumstance.

So don't resist these challenging circumstances, welcome them. Most people don't have to go as far as inviting them, most people's lives are tough enough. But don't resist them, don't see them as a failure of your love of truth. On the contrary, see them as opportunities to deepen, to bring your understanding out into every realm of experience. See them as opportunities.

[Buckland Hall 6th December 2017: *Consider every moment an opportunity*]

Contemplation

The radical cure for suffering is to see that, like empty space, our essential nature of pure Awareness does not know resistance, and thus does not know suffering. [Rupert Spira]