

## Benevolent Indifference

When we hear statements such as ‘awareness is undisturbed by anything that arises in experience’, we might feel that this implies we should be detached from the world, and indifferent to everything that is going on. But as Rupert explains, that is not the full understanding:

RS: ‘Benevolent indifference’ is a term I borrowed from Francis. When we are at the stage of our investigation which involves separating ourself, awareness, from the objects of experience, as the knower of the known or the witness of the witnessed, awareness is then considered to be separate from the objects of experience, and as such, indifferent to them – unchanged, unmoved, unharmed by them. So the reason why Francis added the adjective ‘benevolent’ – the word I usually use is ‘loving’ – is to show that awareness is not just independent of its creation, but has a loving, intimate relationship with it. In just the same way that the screen is independent of the movie, but intimate with the movie. In other words, there is no distance between the screen and the movie. So awareness is both transcendent and immanent. As transcendent, it is indifferent; as immanent it is loving or benevolent.

[Rupert Spira, 5<sup>th</sup> December 2018: *Silence Is the Absolute Truth*]

There’s a subtle difference between ‘accepting’ that things are the way they are and true indifference. ‘Accepting’ has an element of resignation in it – ‘there’s nothing I can do about it, I just have to accept it’. True indifference has no agenda with what is happening. It is completely open, allowing and free. As Rupert says:

Just make sure that there is no rejection in the indifference, no resignation. But it is indifference that is totally allowing and open. No vested interests for or against. Disinterested not uninterested.

To be disinterested is to have no vested interest in the outcome. You can still be very interested in it. But you have no investment in the outcome. So, it is not in any way a removal of ourself from life. That would be rejection posing as indifference. We can be freely engaged in life but at the same time right at the heart of life, completely free of the consequences of what happens.

[Rupert Spira, 26<sup>th</sup> February 2012: [The Allowing Indifference of Awareness](#)]

When we first experience an extended glimpse of our true nature, it is sometimes accompanied by pleasant or even ecstatic states of mind and a pleasant feeling of relaxation in the body. It is commonly believed that on enlightenment, those states would become a permanent experience, and that belief is reinforced in a number of progressive paths. As those of us who have previously followed such a path will recognise, this results in the achievement or repetition of such a state becoming our spiritual goal, and we measure our progress by the frequency and duration of those states. Francis explains that we should be indifferent to all states of body and mind – pleasant or unpleasant:

We should just let everything that is objective flow, almost without noticing it. We should be indifferent to all states, including states of the body. You may go through states in which not only your mind is silent and your body transparent, but also your body is totally expanded and full of light, and it can be very pleasurable. However, even if that happens, it is still a state in the body; it is still something that has a beginning and an end. It comes and goes, so it’s not worth a penny!

[Francis Lucille, *The Perfume of Silence: The Mother of All Problems*]

Ask yourself again, what is it that you are looking for, truth or a pleasant state? ...

Surrender the body, thoughts, and feelings to the consciousness in which they appear from moment to moment. Meet all feelings, sensations, and perceptions with this benevolent indifference. For a while, they [*unpleasant states*] will still arise, but who cares? What is truly present is your presence, invisible yet unavoidable, self-evident, ever-present.

[Francis Lucille, *The Perfume of Silence*: Peace the Universal Container]

Francis makes it clear that meditation and the practice of benevolent indifference needs to become integral to every aspect of our life.

We should make our interaction with others part of our meditation practice. In this way, we will never be out of meditation, whether we are with our co-workers, customers, employer, employees, strangers, family, friends, or simply on our own. These are wonderful opportunities to meditate, to practise higher reasoning and higher sensing, in the presence of others. In your interaction with others, practise benevolent indifference, listening to and welcoming what they say, do, or project, and also your own responses, without resistance. That will go a long way in transforming our life.

The sitting meditation we do in our bedroom once or twice a day is simply a preparation for the real meditation, the big meditation, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. If we practise in the privacy of our bedrooms, it will be easier and more natural to practise during the day. However, it will still require goodwill and desire to do so during the day. If we don't do so, everything we have learned here will remain frozen. It will not die, but it will remain a frozen embryo. However, if we practise it in daily life, it will permeate our life with sweetness.

[Francis Lucille, *The Perfume of Silence*: The Desire for the Absolute]

This might seem difficult to achieve given the culture in which we live and work. At work, we are expected to care about whether our company does well, whether our project is completed on time and within budget, whether we meet our targets, whether our work has a positive outcome, whether our boss and our colleagues think well of us and so on. A similar situation applies in our relationships with our friends, neighbours and relatives: we are expected to care about local issues, about the educational achievements of our young relatives, about politics, the environment etc. But how can we maintain an attitude of benevolent indifference, while still showing that we care about those things? How can we avoid becoming attached to the outcomes? Here is Francis's answer:

*Q: I have a question about being detached from things in life, but at the same time participating fully in life. It seems like it's human nature to easily get attached when you participate. We do things, we meet people, we plan trips, we set goals – we get attached to them. And if I want to try to detach myself, I sabotage the good things that are happening to me.*

FL: It could be said there are two kinds of attachment – personal attachment and impersonal attachment. The distinction between both is that personal attachment comes from fear and desire. Impersonal attachment comes from interest and love. The example I use is playing tennis. You are attached to the ball when you play tennis. Because if you are not attached to the ball you are not going to hit the ball. So you have to be very careful about following the ball, tracking the ball, moving towards the ball, preparing, taking back etc. – doing all these things, and it requires tender, loving care. So you play the game as if it mattered. That's the attachment - you play the game as if it mattered, but ultimately it doesn't. You see that's the beauty of it because it's a game.

In other words, that's what's expressed by saying in the karma-yoga not to be attached to the outcome of the action. You don't care about the outcome, as with Arjuna<sup>1</sup>. You do your dharma, and then be free from the outcome. You may be killed in the battle, or you may kill your cousins. But it doesn't matter. ...

You do your dharma, but it comes from joy. With this type of attachment, like playing tennis, the joy, the reward is not at the end of the deed. It is right in the beginning and during. So it's a safer thing regarding happiness. You can never secure happiness in the future. But you can do things out of happiness. That's the idea. So you have to find the happiness first, which is the source of the action and then do the deed that follows from peace or happiness or love. All these are equivalent. Love, beauty, intelligence, happiness – they are different colours of the same light, which is the light of the self. So you have to seek the light of the self in all your deeds. Then act in this light, from this light – not towards this light. If you are towards the light, you make an object out of the light. Whereas if you are from the light and in the light, you make nothing of it. It is an experience. So that's the idea.

And that's why you are indifferent to the outcome. That's impersonal attachment. You do your dharma, you are attached to what you do. When you kill your cousins<sup>1</sup>, you make sure they are dead! You do it right. You don't do it half-way, otherwise they can kill you! So you do it right, but you are indifferent to the outcome.

And the other attachment then is when the person is involved as if the future happiness of the person (which is never going to happen) were in play. That's never the case. It's just an illusion. Then you are afraid that if you don't win the tennis game, your wife is going to be angry with you, which she won't. So why worry? Or you lose face, or whatever. Who cares – it's only a game?

So that's this feeling, to be attached without being attached, to be attached impersonally, without being attached personally. And that can help you discriminate between the two forms of attachment. And then you will realise that this will empower you to act in life. And in fact, because we love perfection, the closer to the truth, the more deeply in love with the truth we are, the more we seek perfection in our actions. Whatever we do, we try to do it the best we can. And even if we are not skilled – I am a very lousy tennis player or musician – but I do my best to do it well, because the joy is in pursuing perfection. It's not even being perfect – nobody is perfect, nobody has wings behind their backs, nobody is an angel, but everybody can pursue perfection. That's the difference.

*Q: How does that work when you set goals for something that will happen in the future?*

FL: Yes, but that's the same thing. You may have a personal goal or an impersonal goal. And the difference is the same: that a personal goal comes with fear and desire; an impersonal goal is just a game. If you play a tennis game or if you play golf with your friends, and you play for what – a meal at the restaurant? Ultimately, it's no big deal. Whether you lose or win doesn't matter. So you play it for the sake of the game. So you play for the pleasure, for the enjoyment of the game. So life is a big game. Think of it as a big game. And then it becomes a playground, instead of being a workshop. If I were a Congressman, I would offer a statute to replace Labour Day with Play Day. It sounds more sacred!

[Francis Lucille, 16<sup>th</sup> November 2013: [Two Types of Attachment](#)]

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapters 1 and 2 of the Bhagavad Gita. Read online [here](#).

Notice that Francis stresses the importance of doing everything to the best of our ability: being 'indifferent to the outcome' is not a licence for careless, slap-dash action. Rupert sometimes quotes these lines from a well-known poem by George Herbert:

*Teach me my God and King  
In all things Thee to see  
And what I do in anything  
To do it as for Thee*

My previous teacher, Dr Francis Roles, used to express it as 'doing everything as if you are in the presence of an honoured guest'. That 'honoured guest' is our self. If we are truly abiding as our self, awareness, it's automatic; all actions come from happiness, love, intelligence and a sense of beauty. That's true loving indifference.

## **Contemplation**

*Our essential nature of pure Awareness has no agenda with the mind, body or world. It is like empty space, completely allowing, and yet indifferent to whatever appears within it. However, it is not a cold, distant indifference: it gives its substance utterly and intimately to whatever appears within it. As such, it is a loving indifference. Be knowingly this loving indifference.*

[Rupert Spira]