



« Peace is not an absence of war, it is a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence, justice. » Spinoza

Benevolence

Benevolence is, like happiness, a state of mind, a way of looking at the world, with eyes full of love, without any judgement, as one smiles while watching a child play: the child jumps, runs, falls, gets back on his feet, runs again, usually indifferent to the world around him immersed in his imagination...

In our societies, we have a tendency to judge one another, on what we say, what we do, how we look... Each of our daily actions is a choice, each of our reaction or emotion at a given moment is a choice. Benevolence is one of those choices. Unfortunately, for most of us, those behaviours are more unconscious reflexes than real choices.

When I began looking for more serenity and peace in my life, I had to bring to consciousness as many of my choices as possible to be able to change them if the emotions related to them didn't agree with what I wanted to experience. It took me a lot of time, energy and patience to do so but it allowed me to understand how harsh or demanding we can be with ourselves and how much, negatively of course, we automatically judge our actions.

Benevolence often comes through simple gestures in our everyday lives. For example, have you noticed how we always apologize for anything and everything, especially for being late? If, instead of apologizing to the person who was kind enough to wait for us, we would thank that person for his patience, we would value him for his qualities – patience – and appeal directly to his benevolence. On our side, instead of putting ourselves in a position of failure because we couldn't



manage to arrive on time, we show kindness to our "imperfection". Gratitude is always benevolence's best friend.

When we make the choice of benevolence, it wraps us up with softness and immediately fills us with a great feeling of gratitude. When we look at our "mistakes" with judgment, when we get angry at ourselves for an action or a word that did not have the expected result, we can shift our point of view to turn that anger into kind indulgence towards ourselves, therefore benevolence... And if we think our reaction was inappropriate, we can always apologize to the person we hurt and integrate that we will change our response the next time we are confronted to a similar situation. We are masters of our lives, not victims of our conditions, we can change the course of things to access happiness at any given time and become permanently the best version of ourselves, the one that makes us fulfilled and proud.

The same goes for our past actions: when we look back, we look at past situations with our present eyes, modified by our new experiences, it is then difficult for us to appreciate those situations in the same way that we did when we lived them; in fact, we are no longer quite the same person. Further more, if we are responsible for the way we act, we are only partly responsible for our actions' results which, sometimes, land very far from the goal we thought we would reach because it relies on so many external parameters that we do not control. On the contrary, the intentions and emotions that we incorporate to our actions make a real difference on their possible outcome: if we go through our life angry, it's a safe bet that we will naturally drive away people wishing to help us, that we won't be able to recognize a positive outcome when we see it and will stay focused on the negative events in our lives.

Once we apply benevolence to ourselves, it is obviously easier for us to practice it with the people around us. For example, when a person gets angry with us, we tend to defend ourselves aggressively to compensate for the emotional or egotic hurt that this person has just inflicted upon us. Our aggressive response extends the conflict and often aggravates it. But if we let that angry person speak, listen to what he or she has to say calmly without being offended – because our ego is so hurt for not being perfect – or without feeling guilty for something we did or did not do – because we never get to do things right –, we are able to recognize and appreciate the expression of the other's suffering, therefore his/her anger, and we are able to apologize for having hurt him/her or to thank him/her for having shared his/her pain with us and allows us to find a solution together to the problem raised.

Like all human values, benevolence opens us up to others and to ourselves and brings peace to our lives. If this vision of the world requires little mental gymnastics at the beginning, it allows us to be constantly in contact with our inner selves and to express the best version of ourselves in all circumstances.