

# The Flies

Bartosz Milewski

It was a hot evening and, as is usual at that time of the year, there were quite a few flies buzzing around us. Understandably, I was annoyed, as they were interfering with my meditation.

“Master.” I said, “You keep telling me that everything in this world has a purpose, but I can’t figure out the purpose of these flies. All they do is break my concentration. Can we move indoors already, behind the screens, so that we can continue the lessons in peace?”

The Master looked at me the way he usually does when I say something that shows my lack of understanding – which unfortunately happens a lot.

“The flies are here to teach us about meditation.” he said.

“How so?” I said. “Are you trying to tell me that I should be able to quiet my mind even when there’s constant interference?”

“That would be the ultimate goal.” said the Master, “but for now I’d like you to observe the way these flies move. Can you do that?”

“Of course, Master.” I said and started watching the flies criss-crossing the air in front of me.

“What do you see?” asked the Master after a while.

“I see them zig-zagging constantly. They never seem to fly in a straight line for longer than a fraction of a second.”

“You are very astute, my Disciple.” said the Master. “Now, why would you say they’re doing that?”

“I think they are doing that to avoid being caught” I said. “Those flies that were, long ago, flying in straight lines were eliminated by predators, and only those that employed more elaborate movement schemes survived long enough to produce offspring. Evolution in action.” I said not without some pride at my cleverness.

“Quite so, my Disciple.” said the Master, “quite so.”

“But suppose.” he continued, “that, in some other Universe, there is a colony of flies that live confined within the boundaries a hostile environment. Their life is short and full of suffering. But there is a benevolent being that can set individual flies free, to live a happy and productive life. The trouble is that she has to catch them first. And, in the beginning, it was easy, since they were all flying in straight lines. Almost all. The benevolent being was able to remove the straight-flying flies and make them happy. But there remained a few flies

that, for one reason or another, kept zig-zagging. They ‘survived’ long enough to produce offspring, some of which also kept zig-zagging. Soon enough, all flies in that hostile and unhappy environment developed this new ‘survival’ strategy that prevented them from escaping their horrible fate. That’s evolution in action, too.”

“That’s a pretty sad story.” I said. “It shows that evolution is a cruel mistress. It doesn’t care if we are happy or not, as long as we produce offspring.”

“But what does it have to do with meditation?” I said, a little confused.

“The flies are our thoughts.” said the Master.