



Shifting Your Relationship With Pain, by Jon Kabat-Zinn

Have you ever noticed that your awareness of pain is not in pain even when you are? I'm sure you have. It is a very common experience, especially in childhood, one we usually don't examine or talk about because it is so fleeting and the pain so much more compelling in the moment it comes upon us. Awareness is imminent and infinitely available, but it is camouflaged, like a shy animal. It usually requires some degree of effort and stillness if not stealth even to catch a glimpse of it, no less get a sustained look, even though it may be entirely out in the open. You have to be alert, curious, motivated to see it. With awareness, you have to be willing to let the knowing of it come to you, to invite it in, silently and skillfully in the midst of whatever you're thinking or experiencing. After all, you are already seeing; you are already hearing. There is awareness in all of that, coming through all the sense doors, including your mind, right here, right now. If you move into pure awareness in the midst of pain, even for the tiniest moment, your relationship with your pain is going to shift right in that very moment. It is impossible for it not to change because the gesture of holding it, even if not sustained for long, even for a second or two, already reveals its larger dimensionality. And that shift in your relationship with the experience gives you more degrees of freedom in your attitude and your actions in a given situation, whatever it is ... even if you don't know what to do. The not knowing is its own kind of knowing, when the not knowing is embraced in awareness. Sounds strange, I know, but with ongoing practice, it may start making very real sense to you, viscerally, at a gut level, way deeper than thought. None of us need to inflict pain upon ourselves just so that we can test out this unique property of awareness to be bigger than and of a different nature than our pain. All we need to do is be alert to the arrival of pain when it shows up, whatever its form. Our alertness gives rise to awareness at the moment of contact with the initiating event, whether it be a sensation or a thought, a look or a glance, what someone says, or what happens in any moment. It is in that moment, and in its aftermath, that we might bring awareness to the state in which we find ourselves, the state of the body and of the mind and heart. And then we take one more leap, bringing awareness to the awareness itself, noticing whether your awareness itself is in pain, or angry, or frightened, or sad. It won't be. It can't be. But you have to check for yourself. --Jon Kabat-Zinn