



Touched by Pain of Life, by Jack Kornfield

To live in the present demands an ongoing and unwavering commitment. As we follow a spiritual path, we are required to stop the war not once but many times. Over and over we feel the familiar tug of thoughts and reactions that take us away from the present moment. When we stop and listen, we can feel how each thing that we fear or crave (really two sides of the same dissatisfaction) propels us out of our hearts into a false idea of how we would like life to be. If we listen even more closely, we can feel how we have learned to sense ourselves as limited by that fear and identified with that craving. From this small sense of ourselves, we often believe that our own happiness can come only from possessing something or can be only at someone else's expense. [...]

To stop the war and come into the present is to discover a greatness of our own heart that can include the happiness of all beings as inseparable from our own. When we let ourselves feel the fear, the discontent, the difficulties we have always avoided, our heart softens. Just as it is a courageous act to face all the difficulties from which we have always run, it is also an act of compassion. According to (various) scriptures, compassion is the "quivering of the pure heart" when we have allowed ourselves to be touched by the pain of life. The knowledge that we can do this and survive helps us to awaken the greatness of our heart. With greatness of heart, we can sustain a presence in the midst of life's suffering, in the midst of life's fleeting impermanence. We can open to the world -- its ten thousand joys and ten thousand sorrows.

-- Jack Kornfield, "A Path With Heart"