You Will Not Get Faster at Not Feeling It

The measure of an inner practice is not whether anxiety arrives. It is how long it takes you to notice, and how cleanly it moves through.

Most people who begin an inner practice are secretly running an experiment. They are testing whether the practice makes the bad feeling stop coming. Six months in they take inventory. The anxiety still shows up on Sunday night. The tightness still arrives before the hard conversation. And they conclude, quietly and without telling anybody, that it did not work.

I understand the logic. It is the same logic that made them successful everywhere else. You apply effort to a problem, the problem gets smaller, and the shrinking of the problem is the proof. So they apply the achievement apparatus inward and wait for the graph to go down.

But the graph does not go down. Not in the way they mean. I have been at this a long time and I still feel the whole range of it. Anxiety arrives in me the way weather arrives.

What actually changes is something quieter, and it took me years to trust it as the real measure.

> *It's that you're aware when it starts, you feel it as it comes up and you process it more efficiently every time.*
>
> TIM DAVIS

There is a phrase I use for it: **awareness plus experience equals release.** Awareness is not the absence of the thing. Awareness is being present at the beginning of the thing. That is the whole shift, and it is easy to say and slow to live.

Consider what usually happens. Something lands. There is a jolt in the chest, small enough that you do not register it as an event. Twenty minutes later you are curt with somebody who did not deserve it. Two hours later you are rehearsing an argument in the shower. You never once met the jolt. You only met its descendants, and by then they had multiplied and put on costumes.

Now consider the alternative. The same thing lands. There is the same jolt. But this time you feel it *as it starts* — not the story about it, the physical fact of it — and you stay with it for the length of one breath. Nothing dramatic happens. You do not become peaceful. But that energy came up, and you let it come up, and it moved. It did not need to recruit the afternoon.

That is efficiency. It is an unglamorous word for a spiritual outcome, and I use it on purpose, because the people I work with respect it. The same disturbance that used to consume a day now consumes ten minutes. Later, ninety seconds. The disturbance did not get smaller. The distance between the trigger and your awareness of it got shorter, and the time you spend feeding it got shorter, and those two shortenings are what a practice actually buys you.

Here is where it matters for anyone carrying weight. When you are the one who decides, your unprocessed energy does not stay yours. It becomes the temperature of a room. Someone who cannot feel their own jolt at the start will hand it out all day and call it standards.

So the question I would rather you ask, instead of *did I stay calm*, is: **am I coming from fear or from love right now?** Fear is not disqualifying. It is information, and it deserves a hearing. It only becomes a problem when it drives while wearing the mask of decisiveness.

There is a version of this teaching that turns into another performance, so let me argue with myself. You can absolutely use awareness as a new stick to beat yourself with. If that is happening, you have simply moved the achievement machine one level in. Soften around it. Not surrender, which sounds like defeat and is not what I mean. Soften. Let the edges go loose so the energy has somewhere to pass through.

And be honest about the cost curve. When you first stop suppressing, you will feel more, not less, and you will be tired. Something held down for twenty years does not come up politely.

But every pass is cheaper than the last. That is the promise, and it is the only one I will make. You will not get better at not feeling it. You will get better at being there when it starts, and at letting it finish, and at not making the rest of your day pay for it.

THE PRACTICE

This week: stop scoring yourself on whether the anxiety came. Score yourself on how early you noticed it, and whether you let it finish.