MINDAMITY

Awaken · Align · Evolve

The Second Arrow

WHEN OUR THOUGHTS ADD TO OUR PAIN

An ancient Buddhist teaching, known as the two arrows, reminds us that life will sometimes bring pain. This is part of being human. The first arrow is the experience itself, something that lands in our lives, often unexpectedly.

The second arrow is the extra suffering we add through our thoughts, reactions and stories about what has happened.

We may not be able to stop the first arrow, but we can become more aware of the second arrow, and with practice, choose a kinder and wiser response.

Awareness gives us a breath between what happens and how we respond, and in that space we can choose a different way.

The First Arrow

This is the event itself.
It might be a painful conversation, an unexpected diagnosis, a rejection, a disappointment, or a difficult feeling such as anxiety or grief.
It lands, and it hurts.

The Second Arrow

This is the story we tell ourselves about what has happened.
It can be the thoughts, judgements, what ifs, self criticism and worst case scenarios that keep the pain going, often for much longer than the event itself.

Inspired by the Buddhist teaching of the two arrows. Sallatha Sutta (SN 36.6).

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From Reaction to a Kinder Response

A GENTLE PROCESS TO HELP YOU NOTICE, PAUSE AND REFRAME

1

The arrow hits

Something happens. The first arrow lands. Notice what it is, without adding a story. What actually happened?

2

Pain lands

Feel what is here. It might be a tight chest, a heavy feeling, anger, sadness or fear. Allow the feeling to be there, without trying to push it away.

3

Awareness opens

Notice the second arrow. What thoughts are arising? What story am I telling myself? Am I imagining the worst? Am I being hard on myself? Can I see this as a thought, rather than a fact?

4

A breath to pause

Take a slow, gentle breath. This gives you a little space. You might try a longer out breath, or your own way of breathing that helps you to settle. In this space, you can choose.

5

Respond and reframe

Now, what might be a kinder, wiser way to look at this? What is a more helpful thought? What do I need right now? How can I support myself?

A little space for you

What is one small shift you canmake, or a kinder thought you can choose, the next time you notice your second arrow?

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