

It is good to observe these thoughts and reactions--and then let them go. A preoccupation with these thoughts and reactions is not mindfulness. Mindfulness stirs in the spaces between these thoughts and reactions, however peculiar that may sound. What does "the spaces between" mean?

After I have observed my reaction to the courageous and independent dog I have paraded past my mind's eye, there may be a flicker of doubt or confusion or, more rarely still, silence. Turning one's attention quietly but quickly to this spark of doubt or confusion or silence, one may catch a glimpse of an expanse of openness that leaves one feeling a touch uneasy, vulnerable. If we are talking about a mindful study of our relationship to dogs, this openness, this vulnerability, has the faintest resemblance to--and this sound peculiar, indeed, but there is no other word for it--a bark. Yes, this uneasy sense of openness sounds like a barely audible bark. Is this not bizarre?

No! We discover through mindfulness a strange but strangely familiar affinity with the animals that inhabit our consciousness. A word of reassurance, though: by "affinity with animals," I am not suggesting that one ought to become an animal. Mindfulness does not lead to packs of human beings running into the streets barking and howling (although as protests to injustices perpetrated on humans and animals, such action would certainly call attention to the cause of human and animal liberation). The "bark" I refer to is a symbolic bark, but it is more than this. A bark is a miracle, but it takes the work of mindfulness to make it so. The bark that rises out of a mindful study of our relationship is, in Buddhist terms, the sound of the Original Self, that Being which unites all sentient creatures. We are animals, and we are not-animals. We are like animals and unlike animals. It is our task to find out what our true nature is as human beings, and this can only be done when we make a compassionate, mindful study of our true relationship to the animals with whom we share this world. And if we are truly open, then there will surely be some surprises in store for us--at least a bark or two.

I have artificially sped up the process from alienation to affinity, as one might do with the germination of a seed that blossoms into a full-bodied rose as it is captured on

film, but there it is, nonetheless. Mindfulness unfolds a flowering affinity for animals that grows out of the compost of alienation and abuse. This is so; you can observe it for yourself in your own life through mindfulness. Mindfulness is a self-study of our affinity toward animals set against a background of benevolent domination or horrid exploitation. But this should not be taken on faith; it should be experienced for oneself, through mindfulness.



Jim Barter, *Animals*: 1419
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New York: Dover, 1979

BOOKS RECEIVED

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