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### **Busy Minds, Kindness and the 10% Surprise- Good News about Awareness**

One of the greatest challenges for people on a path of awareness, is the discovery of how often one is unaware. When one is committed to being present in life, it is daunting and downright harrowing, to discover one's degree of unconsciousness.

I am writing with good news from someone who has been traversing this path for more than four decades. This good news comes in four overlapping parts.

First, to be fully present in life does not require an absence of thought. Sure, in meditation there will come more extended moments of silence and spaciousness. Still, the brain will spew thoughts, sensations and feelings automatically, even when there is no environmental demand. This is its nature. As the famous Zen master, Uchiyama Roshi says: "just as the stomach secretes acid so the brain secretes thoughts". This is not a problem unless we begin to fight the thoughts or have the belief that there should be no thoughts. As one becomes more accepting of the playful, irreverent and sometimes dramatic creations of the cerebral cortex, there is a sense that most of these thoughts are both random and insignificant. Then, because the field of consciousness is not flat but deep, the spaciousness around each thought becomes more and more apparent. Thus even with a moderately busy mind, we can rest in that spaciousness of Being known as awareness. This is nectar, a deep refreshment.

Second, the process of Embodied Meditation, or "just sitting" (shikantaza in Japanese) is mysterious. There is a transformative, developmental effect on one's natural awareness even when progress seems almost nonexistent. Paradoxically, the capacity for awareness grows behind the scenes, under the surface, unconsciously - outside of awareness. The commitment to the path, especially to sitting meditation is the key. In addition, creating short moments, 5 - 10 seconds here and there of self-remembering, many times a day, will create surprisingly helpful effects over time. This is often unnoticed yet very consistent and dependable.

Third, in Embodied Life practices, as we experience the disappointing frequency of our absencing, we are simultaneously developing our commitment to a practice of kindness. Every moment is an opportunity for unconditional caring. Our historic self - identity feasts on judgments, while unconditional caring is an expression of our True nature. Practicing kindness connects us to this more authentic sense of Self. This means that deeper than any frustration or sense of futility is the intention to be welcoming in warm-hearted ways to whatever appears including the judgments and reactive patterns. Welcoming does not imply "liking" or denying one's struggle, rather it is a bold "yes" to ALL THAT!

For example, imagine that in an ordinary moment or in meditation, a challenging thought has hijacked awareness for a long period of time. In the moment of noticing, there might be a habitual self-judgment and maybe even strong emotional reaction such as anger or resignation. In this practice, as soon as possible, we meet all of this with kindness, both toward the mind state and any reactions to the mind state. Thus, awareness is growing and we are expanding our capacity for compassion. Both are positive results.

Fourth, and very good news, is the observation I call the 10% surprise. It goes like this: as soon as we commit to a path of awareness, we begin to sense that we are even more unconscious

then we ever knew. This can be disheartening. We see the immensity of our unconsciousness and wonder if it is even possible to wake up from such darkness. The good news is that it is not a linear equation: you do not need an equal number of aware moments to counteract the number of absent moments. Each moment of awareness has a quantum impact, disproportionate to its duration in time. In fact, if we can wake up a little bit more, even a few percentage points, the effect on our lives will be palpable. Going further, a 10% difference will create a seismic, transformative shift in your life and the lives of all the beings that you meet. Good news indeed!

Waking up is hard work, yet, I suspect that for most people reading this writing, the alternative of staying lost in old mind-states and reactive patterns is no longer a viable alternative. I encourage you to lean into the Good News about awareness- it is more satisfying, more joyful, kinder and more accessible than you might think. I wish you well on your journey.