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to move in the direction
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DISRUPT BELIEFS. EMPOWER CHANGE.

CHAPTER 1: AWARENESS

“Rather than being your thoughts and emotions, be the awareness behind them.”

~ Eckhart Tolle

Awareness is the key first step toward creating the life we desire and the life that is right for us. It is the secret sauce that will help us SheDefine our lives. Without awareness, we cannot change anything. It is the mental springboard of progress. Within the definition of awareness, we find words like knowledge, realization, perception, and consciousness. These are interchangeable words we want in abundance in our lives. We can never be too aware. So let's focus inward and see what we find. But first, we'll briefly examine the opposite of awareness.

Too often, we are operating unconsciously, or *unaware*. We go through our day on autopilot. We are robotic in our thoughts and actions. We feel detached and even empty. We are operating without awareness. It seems impossible, but we've all experienced driving on the highway at a high rate of speed and arriving to our destination with only a spotty recollection of the journey. We've done it so many times; we can make it almost anywhere without being fully present. Just as easily, we can be driving and completely miss our exit for the same reason, because we lack awareness. This is a real life example that is dangerous to our physical bodies, and reflective of an all too common state of mind.

There are dozens of examples in our daily lives. The times we are having a conversation on our cell phone, and wondering where our cell phone is. I personally have had numerous cell phone conversations with my husband, while asking him to give me a minute to find my phone! We chalk these events up to mind clutter and stress and laugh them off as part of life.

But in reality, they are the symptoms of a greater issue. They keep us from growing and making progress. Our lack of self-awareness holds us back.

How about the times when we speak thoughtlessly? When we say hurtful or rude things that we wish we could take back? These harsh words tumble out in a moment of fury or frustration. They are unconscious words, but once said cannot be unsaid. They do damage to the person hearing them and to the person who uttered them. They come from a lack of self-awareness and understanding. Spoken, without thought, or from negative thoughts and feelings. Have you ever been embarrassed because someone just told you something and two minutes later in your conversation you ask a question that was previously answered? It's like getting caught out. The person knows that you were engaging in mindless conversation, and worse, weren't even listening to what they were telling you. You feel awful. You don't want to be thought of as a person who doesn't listen or doesn't care. Without awareness, you will continue to have those cringe worthy moments over and over.

Now, take a step away from the daily examples of un-awareness and take a look at your life as a whole. How often do you say things like, "How did I get here?" or "How did my life get to this point?" How much of your life feels like it has merely "happened" to you? How much of your life is the result of what could be defined as Bad Choices? Take a serious introspective look. We can SheDefine a *Bad Choice* as a choice that was made while lacking awareness. That's it. Bad choices do not make you a bad person. It's such an important concept. I'll repeat it. ***Bad Choices do not make you a bad person.*** They don't limit you either. You can change direction and make a new choice any time and over and over again. Of course, we have to acknowledge that some bad choices have more serious consequences. But, no matter what choice was made, we can pivot and head in another direction. No matter what.

When we decide to pivot and turn our back on our “bad choices,” our new choices must be made from awareness. They must be conscious choices. Awareness of our thoughts, feelings, needs, wants, desires, passions, purpose. Awareness is a tool we must commit to using to make better decisions, better choices.

Let’s reflect on a choice that we made in our lives. It can be yesterday, or it can be a decade ago. What steps did we take in making that choice? What was our motivation for making it? Did we make it out of fear? Did we make it because we wanted to please someone else? Did we make it because we were afraid of what people would think if we made another choice? Was it made from a place of anger or to “prove a point?” Was it made because it seemed easy? It’s important to be honest with ourselves, but without judgment. Identify a choice and now think about it differently. What if we had considered this choice from a state of awareness? What if we had made this choice fully taking into account our passion, purpose, values, needs, wants, desires? What if we had made this decision from a place of clarity and peace, self-love and reflection? Would the choice have been different? If the answer is yes, that is progress! Just a little introspection on a past event has created some self-awareness. We can’t change the past, but we can change the course of our future.

When we make decisions and choices from a place of deep awareness, the outcomes are different. Choices are made that SERVE us. Because of our self-awareness, we can make decisions that serve our purpose, passion and values. We can learn to really follow our intuition, and to listen to our “gut.” This doesn’t mean that the choices we make in awareness are the easy choices. Sometimes they are the hardest choices, but they are the ones we need to make to be aligned with our true purpose.

When reflecting, we must be gentle with ourselves. It is difficult to come to terms with some of our choice motivations. We know what the outcomes are, we're living them, but it doesn't make looking back any less taxing. The purpose of reviewing our decisions is not meant to shame us. We can't use it as an excuse to berate ourselves. Instead, it should be a joyous realization that starting now, we can, in awareness, consciously create what's next! This is great news! When we know better, we do better. It's time to do better.

Becoming self-aware, and aware in general, starts with noticing the little things, the every day things. It is a habit, a choice. It can be as simple as consciously feeling the warmth of the sun on our faces or noticing how a tree sways in the wind, or the sounds of the birds in the morning or the car horns in the city. Don't take these noises for granted because you are used to them. Stop and listen. What exactly is going on around you? It's a symphony of sound, or a symphony of white noise. Become aware of it.

Let's do an exercise. You don't have to move. Just keep reading...

AWARENESS EXERCISE

Start with awareness of NOW. Take a deep breath. Feel the breath filling your lungs. Let it out through your nose. Feel air flowing out of your nose. Are you stuffy or is your nose clear? Does it feel good to take a deep breath or does it feel weird, heavy? Does it make you lightheaded?

Become aware of your surroundings – as if for the first time. Really look around and feel. What is the temperature of the room? Are you warm, comfortable, cold? Don't judge it....just notice it.

Next, feel your "self". How are your neck, your back, and your legs feeling? Are they relaxed? Are they tense? Just notice. Are you slouching?

Are you seated comfortably? Feel the chair or bed or couch, whatever is supporting your body. Is it hard or soft? Warm or cold? Just notice.

Now, listen. Really listen to the sounds around you. What do you hear? Take a minute...no need to rush.

What did you hear? Silence? Do you hear the sound of children playing? Do you hear the sounds of other members of your family in the house? Crickets? Do you hear a clock ticking or the sounds of technology? Do you hear the air conditioner or heater kicking on and off? Dogs barking? Again, no judgment of the sound (I know...easier said than done.) Just notice it.

Now let's take another deep breath. A big, deep breath. This time let it out very, very, very slowly. Take a couple of breaths like this. These are cleansing breaths.

And, notice your thoughts. What is going on in your internal dialogue? Are your thoughts incessant? Or have they silenced a bit? Really become aware of what you are thinking and how those thoughts are creating your reality. Are they reminding you of all the things you need to do, but aren't doing? Are they supporting you in this moment? OR not? Are your thoughts silent?

Remember, just notice...and let them drift by. Try not to engage. But, if you do, just go back to concentrating on your breath.

Now take a step inside. Close your eyes. Imagine you are looking at yourself from the inside. Start at the top of your head. Keep scanning downward. Check in with your body. How is the top of your head? Is it clear, foggy, headachy? Just notice. How is your jaw? Is it clenched or relaxed? How about your shoulders? Do you need to release them? Travel

down a bit further...can you notice and feel your heartbeat? Put your attention and focus onto your heart. Don't think about it. Just notice it. What do you feel? Do you notice it? You may or may not.

Next, move to your gut...that area right in between your ribs, just below your chest. How does it feel? Is it tight? Anxious? Relaxed? Calm? Just notice. This is an area to pay very close attention to – it gives us great insight into what we are feeling and sensing. Our gut is an instrument I would highly recommend paying attention to and trusting.

This is just one exercise that can bring you to the state of AWARENESS. And, in awareness, we can make changes. We can make a new choice, or step back when needed. Awareness opens our life, our heart, and our minds to great possibilities!

And, this, my friend, is just the beginning...