

## THE POWER OF PAYING ATTENTION

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Our capacities to pay attention and be aware are two foundational principles for learning and leadership. We ask you to pay attention to your body, to the stories you tell yourself, to the stories you tell others, and to the deep biological structures that occur before intention, language and thinking. We ask you to do this to become an observer of the embodied *conditioned tendencies* that prevent us from being self-generating, self-educating, and self-healing. When we are caught in our conditioning, we become fragmented and react automatically, without choice. By attending to our internal conversations, our bodily reactions, and the way we shape ourselves to others, we are able to see how and where we are gripped by our historical conditioning. To develop the observer of these reflexive conditioned tendencies is the first step in returning ourselves to center and choice. In order to do this, the first order of business is to pay attention.

### **Energy Follows Attention**

When we're not paying attention, we miss life. When we're awake and alive, we are participants in life. What we attend to comes to the foreground of our awareness. What we pay attention to becomes a world in which we can participate. As an example of this, direct your attention to your breath; now move your attention to the sounds around you; now remember a loved one. As you moved your attention, you will have noticed that where you placed your attention became more vivid and alive. What we pay attention to becomes our reality.

### **Choice Follows Awareness**

Once something is in our field of awareness, we have increased our ability to choose how to interact with it. Instead of it having power over us, we can choose how to interact with it. When you focused your attention on your breath,

for example, you could then choose to slow your breath, increase it, or move it to a different part of your body.

Through certain practices, we can learn to strengthen, focus, relax, and widen our attention. The sitting and jo practices are simple but powerful ways to develop the organ of attention. Approach these practices with an open-ended curiosity. Notice without prejudice the feeling when your concentration builds or when it drifts. See what habitually takes your attention, and how you can return your attention to what you choose. Remember there are no good or bad sittings or jo katas. You are in a process of strengthening your ability to focus and concentrate in order to act powerfully in the present.

When we ask you to pay attention to your body, there are three places to look. These are SENSATIONS, EMOTIONS and MOODS, and THOUGHTS. In reality these three distinctions are a unity that make up who we are and how we perceive the world. But in learning to observe ourselves and others, we separate them as a convenience of learning.

### **Sensations**

When you pay attention to the sensations in your body, they will appear as temperature (hot, cold), movement (pulsing, throbbing, streaming, expanding, contracting), qualities (soft, hard, light, thick), and form (the shape of a sense feeling: for example, feel the shape of your foot as it contacts the ground). We pay attention to sensation, because it informs us at an organic level if we are contracting or opening to life. It will show us if our body is coherent with the story we are telling about ourselves. If we are coherent, we produce assessments of authenticity and trustworthiness. If we are incoherent, we are seen as inauthentic and untrustworthy. If, for example, we say we are fine when our shoulders are hunched around our ears, we will be seen as out of touch and pretentious. Furthermore, by attending to the sensations of our hunched shoulders, we can assess our own coherency. If I tell myself that I am fine but I am squeezing myself, then I can take action by relaxing my shoulders.

### **Moods**

Pay attention to your mood. Moods are bodily phenomena. Contrary to our common sense, they are not simply thoughts we have about life. Mood is our

embodied orientation to life (awe, despair, resentment, wonder, resignation are a few examples), and lives in a long horizon of time. We don't *have* a mood, we *are* a mood. Emotions have immediacy that express our response to particular situations, and have a shorter life span than moods. Our mood determines what emotions can be expressed. It is difficult, for example, to express excitement when you're in a mood of despair. By paying attention to our moods, we are able to observe and work with our predisposed view of life. Moods that we often fall into are:

***Panic:*** "I have so much to do, I'll never get it done. If I don't work harder and faster, something awful will happen."

***Resolution:*** "I see what needs to be done, and I am committed to taking action now."

***Resignation:*** "I don't see any possibilities, and nothing I do will make a difference."

***Resentment:*** "This is unfair. I am not being treated as I should be."

***Acceptance:*** "I acknowledge that some things are possible and some are not. I am at peace with what is."

***Ambition:*** "What I do is meaningful. My future has many possibilities, and I am committed to fulfilling them."

***Gratitude:*** "Life is a gift, and I am grateful for being alive. Life is good, and I see this unfolding into the future."

***Arrogance:*** "I already know what's going on. There's nothing you can teach me, and you would be better off if you listened to me."

***Learning:*** "There is much to learn, and I see that by being a learner I can open the future I want."

## Thoughts

Pay attention to the automatic unexamined thoughts that intrude into your thinking. The recurrent and historical internal conversations that reside in the

background of our thinking become the ground out of which we build our relationship with life. These conversations form our character and hence, our reality. Becoming an observer of these background thoughts defuses them. If, for example, I have a learned pattern of thinking that tells me that I am not worthy or capable of having satisfying work, my body, moods, emotions and relationships with others will begin to shape around this conversation. I will contract myself so I am physically smaller and take shallow breaths. I will live in a mood of resignation that closes possibilities, and be bitter and angry towards others for their successes. If I pay attention to these thoughts, I will be able to see how and where they affect me, and I will have increased my choices of how to relate to them.

In summary, remember that change and transformation follow awareness. If we try to change without first bringing our attention and awareness to bear on a situation, we risk building new behaviors on a shaky foundation. First direct your attention to your thinking, mood, and what you feel. Learn to observe what is, without judgment or bias. Once we begin to see what is about our historical conditioned tendencies, we can then choose whether to accept them or invent new practices that will produce new actions.

Enjoy your learning!