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Developing Mindfulness and Awareness

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Developing mindfulness and awareness can be like riding a rapids. It is easy to talk about, but actually to do it requires inner strength, stamina. The way to develop inner strength is to take every opportunity to practice it, bit by bit. Opportunities continually present themselves. Constantly practice breaking state and acting independently of the urge of habitual thought and behavior.

- 1) Go slow when you want to go fast, and vice versa. When you feel like contracting in fear, expand. For example, if you are sliding into a poverty mentality, give something away. Return kindness for rudeness. Patience is a form of generosity: cultivate it toward yourself and others. Give both space and time; take a deep breath and shift perspective: look at the sky, feel your feet on the ground. Affirm that there is plenty of time to do everything, and relax the contraction.
- 2) Do ordinary, habitual tasks, like brushing your teeth, with wakeful attention as if for the first (beginner's mind) or last time (awareness of the imminence of death).
- 3) Do things faster or slower than usual, i.e. become attentive to habitual patterns and vary them so you feel the friction.
- 4) Don't base choices or behaviors on external standards, or internalized external standards, such as praise or blame, good or bad, or right or wrong (think more deeply about what causes harm), or others' expectations.
- 5) Take risks, perform small acts of courage (and appreciate them), make arbitrary choices and plans and follow through. Just do it!
- 6) Practice witnessing thoughts and feelings. Sit quietly erect and relaxed, and simply label thoughts and feelings: "thinking ...thinking ...feeling..." Label and witness without getting involved. Build up until you can spend 20 minutes or more a day with this simple exercise.
- 7) Cultivate mindfulness in all your actions throughout the day, and create your own exercises for breaking state, for waking up.

This is a discipline, and true discipline itself is an act of courage: the courage to step outside the trance of narrow self-involvement and fear. To keep it real and fresh requires vigilance. If it becomes a routine habit, you've fallen asleep. If it becomes a duty, an obligation, involved with hope and fear, guilt, or a gaining idea, you will become resentful. Right relationship to wakeful living is the goal of this approach to hypnotherapy, not the trading of

one trance for another.

8) Become aware of how and when you are ruled by your unexamined likes and dislikes. What are they? Make a list.

9) As an exercise, create a script in which you represent your most important goal in life as a living symbol of some sort. Relate to it, feel its energy. Take some time to become fully established in relationship to it, so it becomes alive and vivid. Then visualize it moving straight out into the distance, to the top of a hill where you experience its power and vividness as you simultaneously experience yourself at the beginning of a straight path before you and up the hill to the symbol. Walking this path symbolizes your walking your life's path to attain this goal. As you begin walking, on either side of the path are temptations and obstacles of all sorts, manifesting in varied ways: people, objects of desire or fear, situations from the past, symbols of shame and fear, sadness or grief, seduction and distraction.

These manifestations can try to divert you from your path, but they cannot do one thing: they cannot block your path or prevent you from going step by step, walking wakefully and intentionally. As you go step by step, knowing you are going to stay on the path, focused more and more on your goal, you can afford to take some time to experience things to the right and the left, to hear and feel the pull of their cons, and then to "pop" them and move on. After taking the time you need to do this in a way that builds your inner strength, you come to the bottom of the hill, having left all those things behind. Take one last look back at them, reflecting on how good it feels to have overcome them, and then turn and proceed up the hill into the presence of this living symbol, which has become even more vivid, meaningful, and powerful because of your efforts. Feel its energy permeating you as it merges fully into your being, dissolving into every cell of your body, carrying its resources, intelligence, and power into every part of your being. Take some time to experience this, knowing and sensing it is radiating through your past and future in appropriate and beneficial ways, and then come back.

10) Rest in No-Self and allow Skillful means to flow genuinely. Be ready to be surprised! As you clarify and step out of your own shame-based, fear-based trances, you'll be able to trust the Goodness of your True I-Don't-Know-Who-I-Am Self. You'll be amazed at what comes out of your mouth and at how you behave, and amazed at how this benefits yourself and others. This effortless capacity is the fruit of sincere, persistent efforts to cultivate the forms of discipline and self-inquiry described above. You can't sit and watch fertile ground, no matter how fertile it is, and wait for it to sprout a bountiful crop. You must till it and plant good seed.

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Jack Elias, a Clinical Hypnotherapist in private practice, is founder and director of The Institute for Therapeutic Learning, a licensed Vocational School in Seattle that trains and certifies Transpersonal Clinical Hypnotherapists. Jack presents a unique synthesis of Eastern and Western perspectives on the nature of consciousness and communication, teaching simple yet powerful techniques for achieving one's highest personal and professional goals. Since 1967, Jack has studied Eastern meditation, philosophy and psychology with masters such as Shunryo Suzuki Roshi and Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. Before beginning his teaching and counseling career, Jack worked for 20 years in sales, marketing and financial planning. Jack offers dynamic experiential workshops and seminars, and his Finding True Magic courses are eligible for credit at various universities.

