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## Trusting Awareness

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## Trusting Awareness

I have learned to become aware of the connections between thoughts and feelings, and to trust my decisions about pursuing or dismissing particular currents of thought. Awareness requires continual effort, but the alternative is to be pushed and pulled by the manifold influences that are present during most of our waking hours.

I learned how to become more aware of interior processes through the practice of breathing exercises. While giving full attention to the act of slowly taking a deep breath, followed by deliberately and slowly breathing out until there was no more air to exhale, it was impossible to think about anything other than the act of breathing. It was like stopping the car, and focusing no longer on the traffic, but on the scenery.

Having found a means of bringing a temporary stop to the constant movement of thoughts that had seemed almost beyond my control, I noticed that I could distinguish between one thought and another; that these thoughts often evoked positive or negative feelings; and that I could evaluate lines of thought as being worthy or not of further consideration. It was as though I had moved from the passenger's side to the driver's seat. I had both the pleasure of being able to decide what direction to go, and the weighty responsibility that accompanied such freedom. I had been breathing in and out all my life, just as I had been thinking and had been experiencing a variety of feelings every day. But taking conscious control, first of breathing, then of thinking – this was new.

Deliberate awareness requires trust. We trust ourselves to manage our own lives, and to take responsibility for our thought processes and subsequent decisions. Implicitly, we trust that God gave us the capacity to monitor our thoughts and freedom to choose what we will consider. Rather than reacting to the data of our five senses, we trust our capacity to examine our thoughts about what we perceive in the light of our previous experiences and our values. We surely make mistakes because of our human limitations, but we live and act as fully human, rather than as victims of outside influences and of our own thoughts and impulses.

Normal breathing does not require conscious effort; ongoing awareness can become habitual, but it requires deliberate attention. We can bring ourselves to a level of pleasant quiet of mind through breathing exercises, but we are not forced to deal with thoughts that

are painful. Though honesty requires us to face all of reality, most of us have at times chosen to ignore some thoughts that were challenging or had unpleasant feelings associated with them. If we understand love as necessitating us to stay with another person "in good times and in bad," then proper self-love entails evaluating all the thoughts that we actively consider.

If we want to develop a consistent awareness of what takes place within our minds and spirits, we can utilize a "best practice" of reflection upon our experiences for a few minutes each day. We might begin by taking a few deep breaths, to settle our minds and spirits. When we are ready, we actively recall those thoughts and consequent feelings that readily come to mind, and decide which of them we approve or do not approve, which of them we choose for ongoing response, and which ones we reject as not appropriate for continuing thought or action.

When we consult the map written in our hearts, and choose the direction that leads to our destination, we are engaged in the practice of trusting awareness.