

Noticing Habits Homework Assignment

Before we meet for Class #3, your assignment is to notice one or more of your everyday habits and then to make an intentional choice to try doing it differently, even if only briefly or slightly.

You are encouraged to start with something small, unimportant, and highly automated—something you usually do without thinking at all. Examples might include:

- Which hand you use to brush your teeth
- The order in which you put on your clothes (for example, which pant leg goes in first)
- Where you place your keys or bag when you come home
- The first app you open when you pick up your phone
- How you usually sit down or stand up from a chair

This exercise is an opportunity for you to practice bringing attention to how your conditioned mind routinely works. We all have conditioned minds, which in one sense is just a way of saying that our brains learn from repetition. Over time, our experiences, habits, and environments train us to respond in familiar ways, often without conscious thought. What this means is that much of what we do, think, and feel each day happens on autopilot. That's not a flaw; it's an essential feature of our brains that usually makes us more efficient. If we had to consciously choose every small action, we'd quickly become overwhelmed.

But, as you may already realize, being on autopilot is not always beneficial. Discerning the difference between beneficial and unhelpful habits isn't easy. Even harder is learning how to train ourselves to make choices that serve us and that are consistent with our values.

An important first step is to start noticing what normally goes unnoticed—and what it can feel like to make a deliberate choice rather than simply following a familiar pattern. Try to bear in mind that there is no right or wrong way to do this. The point is simply to notice, not to try to judge your habits of mind as good or bad, though you may notice yourself doing just that. If that happens, see if you can notice that judging was part of your experience.

When we meet for Class #3, we will spend some time sharing our experiences with each other. Be prepared to reflect on questions such as:

- What habit(s) did you choose, and what did you notice when you paid attention to them?
- What was it like to become aware of something you normally do on autopilot?
- What did it feel like to interrupt or change the habit? Did you notice any resistance, awkwardness, irritation, or something else come up?
- Did this experiment affect how you noticed other things during the day?