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INTRODUCTION: WHAT YOU'LL GET OUT OF THIS BOOK

This isn't a book about how to find peace, calm and Zen — though you might reach those places at times with the methods in this book.

This isn't a book about always living life in the moment. Being present is a part of the mindfulness training we'll do here, but there isn't goal to live in the present all the time. I haven't found that to be possible, though when I do achieve it, it's excellent.

This is a book about training your mind. And shifting your focus. And dealing with struggles. And changing your habits.

I've found mindfulness to be **the key to changing everything in your life**. That might seem trite, but consider my findings through years and years of working with my own habit changes and many other peoples' as well:

1. Lots of people struggle to change habits even if they know

what steps to take. The reason is because of patterns of thinking that are sabotaging them, that they aren't aware of.

2. We all struggle with distractions and procrastination. Why? Because of fears and habitual mental patterns that keep us stuck on distractions and turning us from focus. We are unaware of these fears and mental patterns as well.
3. We all struggle with stress, frustration, feeling bad about ourselves, disliking situations we're in, unhappiness with other people. Why? Because of certain ideals that we're clinging to. Letting go of these attachments is the solution, but without awareness of what's going on, we can't let go.
4. We often struggle with finances and clutter, based on habits of procrastination and urges to buy stuff on impulse. There's a lot to these ideas, but I'll ask you to trust me on this as I don't have space to cover this in detail. The problem is that the procrastination and urges are happening in the background, and we can't deal with them if we're not aware of them.

I could go on, but you can see the problem: **we're not aware of the things that are causing our problems.** Developing an awareness through the mental training of mindfulness is the answer. It helps you change everything, much more than almost anyone realizes.

So I'm not going to help you fix all these problems in one book.

That would be a series of books or courses, which I hope to develop eventually. Today, we're going to work on **a set of skills that will enable the fixes to all these problems.**

Here's what we'll be working on:

1. **Mindfulness training.** Basically, training ourselves to focus and stay with what we find in our minds and bodies.
2. **Courage training.** We normally try to avoid the things that arise, but we're going to develop the courage to stay with them. This takes practice, and you'll want to put this off, run to distractions, or use various methods to feel you have control over things that come up. Instead, we'll just focus on staying.
3. **Self-compassion training.** There will be difficulties that arise as we train our minds to stay. We can try to ignore them, try to push them away, try to talk ourselves out of the difficulties. But the best method, I've found, is to give compassion to these difficulties, like a good friend would if you were struggling. We'll train ourselves to do this, and it will work wonders if we do.
4. **Applying these skills to problem areas.** We all have areas we struggle with — whether this is frustration, feeling down, stress, struggling with habits, difficulties with other people, feeling bad about ourselves. We'll learn to apply the skills we're learning to all these areas.

Those are a lot of important things to work on! But we'll do it in small doses, a little each day, and you'll be amazed at the progress if you stick with it for awhile.

This is going to be a purposefully short book — I want you to be able to read a chapter in a short sitting, and then put it into practice. In fact, you might be able to read the entire book in one sitting, but I recommend that you do a chapter a day for about two weeks.

I ask you to trust me. I know some of you are skeptical, and that's OK. Try it and see if I am full of it. If I'm wrong, you wasted some time but learned that I'm full of it. If I'm right, you've learned some extremely valuable life skills.

I know some of you might still have ideals about living the peaceful Zen life of mindfulness and being present all the time. You might have ideas that meditating will bring you calm. You'll likely be disabused of those notions once you get started, because this kind of training can be a bit of a struggle. That's OK — **struggle is what we're learning to deal with!** We want to struggle, and get good at handling it.

Trust me, and trust yourself to do the training with joy and courage and love.

Let's get started!

CHAPTER 1: THE HONEST TRUTH

A lot of people will try to sell you a fantasy: do the steps in this book and it will change your life! You'll be peaceful and calm and mindful and life will be amazing!

I'm not that kind of writer. I'm going to give you the honest truth, because otherwise, when you start this training, you'll be severely disappointed. If you are, you'll probably blame yourself instead of me, but honestly it's my fault if I gave you the wrong idea when you get started.

Here's the honest truth about mindfulness:

- It's hard
- It's messy
- It involves lots of failure
- You have to push into discomfort
- It will often pull rug out from under your feet

- It takes lots of practice
- It takes years to get good at it
- You forget a lot
- You think you're doing it wrong
- It'll show you that you're not as disciplined as you think
- Just when you think you know what you're doing, you're asked to go deeper
- When you think other people should be more mindful, you're wrong
- It requires love

Whew! That's a lot of honesty. In fact, some of you might be discouraged from even starting. Don't be! Here's what you'll also find:

- You just need to take small steps
- You'll progress gradually, and even a little progression can make a big difference
- It's worth the struggle and practice
- It can help you develop better relationships (with others and yourself)
- It'll help you get better at habits
- You can get better at focus and overcoming procrastination

- You don't need to be that disciplined — you just need to have the courage to keep coming back

I won't sell you a fantasy, but I can tell you that it has changed my life more than almost anything else I've learned and practiced. I am not "good" at mindfulness, nor am I that disciplined about it. I just keep coming back, and keep learning new things.

Let's get started, my friends. We'll struggle, we'll learn, we'll enjoy the journey together.

Exercise

Reflect on what ideals you have about mindfulness at the moment. What fears do you have? What is coming up in you that makes you want to avoid it, procrastinate? There are no right answers, and whatever you come up with is OK. Just take a moment to reflect on these questions.