WEEK 2

Beginners Mind Parenting

"The most difficult times for many of us are the ones we give ourselves"

Pema Chodron, When Things Fall Apart

"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking out new landscapes but in having new eyes"

Marcel Proust

Hā ki roto

BREATHE IN

Hā ki waho

BREATHE OU

Beginner's Mind Parenting

When we look at our child with the eyes of a beginner, we may be surprised at what we see. When we open ourselves to experience our child more fully, we expand our view of him. If our child has had difficulties, or a diagnosis, this new perspective can be truly revelatory.

Our image of our child had been shaped through the history of our interactions with her going a long way back. For example;

- *if our child was a colicky or born premature, years later we may still remember the anxious start we had with our child, and this memory may influence the way we interact now with our child.*
- *If our child has been diagnosed with ADHD or autism, this may influence how we look at him, what we expect, and how we interact with him.*
- *We may view our eldest child as the "mature one" and the youngest child may be our "baby" who we love to cuddle and joke with.*

With labels we may pay more attention to behaviours which fit that label, and we may overlook behaviours which do not fit the label.

When this happens automatically, we lose our beginner's mind and can become stuck in rigid or negative ways of seeing our child. When rigid labels narrow our attention, we may miss subtle changes in our child's behaviour and miss opportunities to respond in new or creative ways. Our interactions can become automatic and repetitive, with less room for growth and change.

We may also have trouble seeing ourselves with beginner's mind, instead judging ourselves based on our entire parenting history or our partner's or child's view of us. Or we may view our partner in a rigid way, not seeing him or her fully.

Seeing our child, ourselves, and our partner with the mind of a beginner opens the door a crack for the possibility of change, in every moment. When we see something new in our child, something unexpected, out of character, or fresh, we offer her the gift of experiencing her more fully and giving her the space she needs to grow and change.

Our Brains - Velcro for the Negative, Teflon for the Positive

The way the human brain and memory is set up make it like velcro for negative experiences and teflon for positive experiences. From an evolutionary point of view, we are hard-wired to pay more attention to threatening events and to interpret things negatively and also to encode bad things in memory much more efficiently than positive things. From the point of view of our survival, it is not very costly for us to make 99 mistakes of thinking that the rustling in the bushes is a tiger, when in fact it is the wind. But only one mistake of thinking that it isn't a tiger, when in fact it is- because that would lead to being eaten. (Rick Hanson, The Buddha's Brain, 2009)

The Breath

Breath is life.

You could think of the breath as being like a thread or a chain that links and connects all the events of your life from birth - the beginning; to death - the end. The breath is always there every moment, moving by itself like a river.

Have you ever noticed how the breath changes with our moods – short and shallow when we are tense or angry, faster when we are excited, slow and full when we are happy and almost disappearing when we are afraid? It is there with us all the time. It can be used as a tool, like an anchor, to bring stability to the body and mind when we deliberately choose to become aware of it. We can tune into it any moment during everyday life.

Most of the time, we are not in touch with our breathing – it is just there – forgotten.

So, one of the first things we will do in the Mindfulness Programme is to get in touch with it. We notice how the breath changes with our moods, our thoughts, our movements. We do not have to control the breath – just notice it and get to know it like a friend. All that is necessary is to observe, watch and feel the breath with a sense of interest, in a relaxed manner.

With practice we become more aware of our breathing. We can use it to direct our awareness to different aspects of our lives. For example – to relax tense muscles or focus on a situation that requires attention. Breath can also be used to help deal with pain, anger, relationships or the stress of daily life. During this course, we will be exploring this in great detail.

breathe

she sat at the back
and they said she was shy
she led from the front
and they hated her pride

they asked her advice
and then questioned her guidance
they branded her loud
then were shocked by her silence

when she shared no ambition
they said it was sad
so she told them her dreams
and they said she was mad

they told her they'd listen
then covered their ears
and gave her a hug
whilst they laughed at her fears

and she listened to all of it
thinking she should
be the girl they told her to be
best as she could

but one day she asked
what was best for herself
instead of trying
to please everyone else

so she walked to the forest
and stood with the trees
she heard the wind whisper
and dance with the leaves

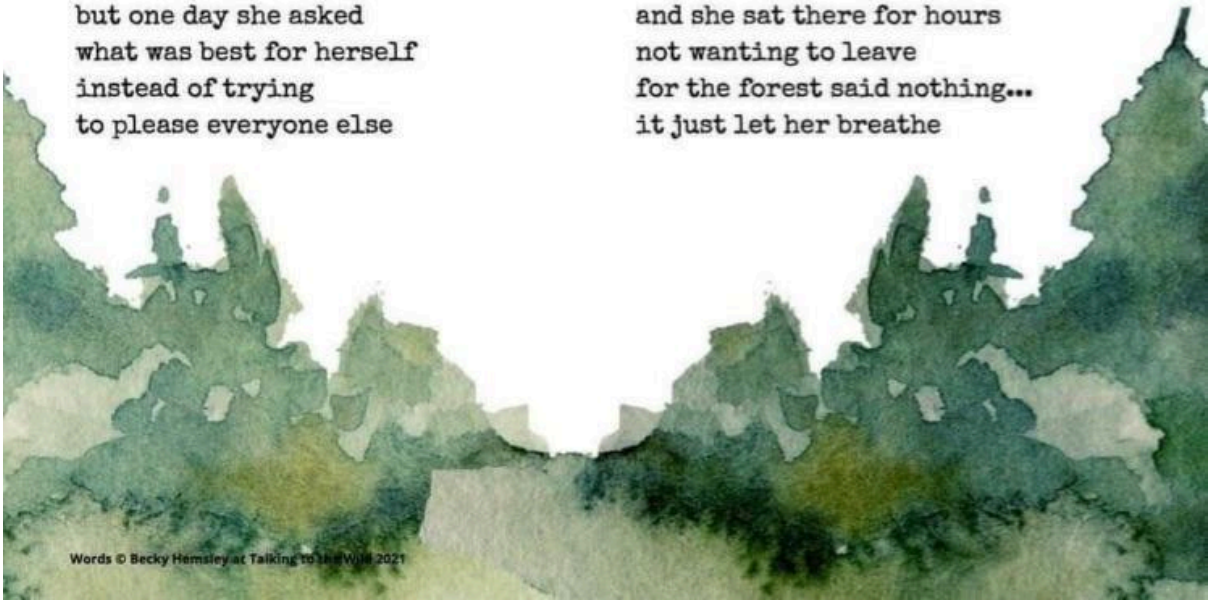
and she spoke to the willow,
the elm and the pine
and she told them what she'd been told
time after time

she told them she never
felt nearly enough
she was either too little
or far, far too much

too loud or too quiet
too fierce or too weak
too wise or too foolish
too bold or too meek

then she found a small clearing
surrounded by firs
and she stopped and she heard
what the trees said to her

and she sat there for hours
not wanting to leave
for the forest said nothing...
it just let her breathe



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