Less Afraid to Be Yourself · About 4 minutes

Noticing Afterward Still Counts

Making use of recognition that arrives after the moment

The poetry reading is over. On the bus home, the answer Imogen couldn't find in the room finally comes to her.

Earlier, she agreed to cover Saturday morning at the community workshop. The yes came easily. Now she realizes that she had wanted Saturday for herself. In this fictional scene, she cares about the workshop and feels disappointed about the plan she has given up. The coordinator has already begun relying on her answer.

It would be easy to turn this into a familiar lesson: Imogen should have known what she wanted and spoken up. But that skips the part she actually needs to understand. Her preference became clear afterward. What can she do with it now?

Perhaps she felt hurried. Perhaps helping genuinely mattered more while she was speaking. Perhaps she had not looked at her calendar. “People-pleasing” may describe part of the picture, but it should not replace curiosity about this particular exchange.

Later recognition gives her something she did not use earlier: she wanted time to consider the request. She may also discover that both choices matter. Missing the reading is disappointing, and contributing to the workshop still feels worthwhile.

Tara Brach’s account of recognition begins with acknowledging thoughts, feelings and behavior as they become available.[1] The everyday application here is to include what you notice, even when the moment you would have preferred to notice it has passed. That is different from promising that awareness will arrive sooner next time.

Two descriptions of Imogen’s afternoon lead in different directions. “I said yes, so the reading can’t have mattered” dismisses her later experience. “I said yes before considering the reading, and somebody is now counting on me” keeps the disappointment and the agreement in view.

Imogen could decide to keep the shift. She could ask whether another arrangement is available and acknowledge the inconvenience of changing her answer. She might learn that there is no replacement. Her preference deserves a place in the decision without making the existing commitment disappear.

There is no need to settle all of this on the bus. If she is tired, she may simply remember that next time she wants a moment before answering. If she does contact the coordinator, the coordinator’s actual reply will matter more than the answer she imagines.

This is also a useful distinction for anyone trying to become more aware of themselves. Recognition can turn punitive when every discovery becomes another assignment: now I must correct it, explain it and make sure it never happens again. You can learn something without converting it into a performance requirement.

Imogen’s discovery comes on the bus, when there is finally some quiet.

The next invitation is still a ways off. For now she can watch the streets go by and hear, at last, the answer she would have liked to give.

Companion reading · Less Afraid to Be Yourself

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Full pathway companion · included with paid learning
Pathway introduction: Less Afraid to Be Yourself (public introduction; full modules require access).

Sources and further reading

[1] Brach, T. (2020, January 1). RAIN: A practice of radical compassion. Tara Brach. Source.

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