

Always Beginning

by Lisa Hoffman

I was to give a talk on beginners mind in less than 24 hours and had no idea what I would say.

The perfection of the situation completely escaped me. After 10 years of Zen Buddhist practice, I was in my first year of training to ordain as a priest. With such experience, I felt that I should have a lot to say, and that what I said should be profoundly wise, and enlighten a few people along the way. Otherwise, what kind of priest could I possibly become?

I again read the seminal quote on the topic: "In the beginners mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's mind there are few." It's from a lecture by Shunryu Suzuki-Roshi, founder of San Francisco Zen Center.

This still didn't inspire the flash of dharmic brilliance I kept expecting it to.

I believe that Suzuki-Roshi at this point reached down from Zen master heaven and slapped me upside the head because I suddenly found myself laughing.

Duh. This *is* beginners mind.

My preoccupation with being an "expert" on beginners mind had paralyzed me. I really wasn't sure what I knew about beginners mind or what to say. So I started there. I relaxed into the expansiveness of not knowing. I'd see what would, or, this being Zen, would not, happen.

I had also forgotten how much I am inspired by beginners mind. It is a place of openness, of drinking in each experience, of everything being new. Meditation is the direct experience of beginners mind because each moment is exactly as it is, regardless of what you think should happen.

How often have you thought you knew something, only to be surprised by reality?

What would it have been like if your attitude had been "don't know"?

It is an ongoing lesson for me.

Beginners mind enables us to approach each situation without believing that we know how a person will act, how a problem should be solved, or how we should be. "Don't know" allows life to happen in its own way.

I wonder what I will say in less than 24 hours?

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