

Dharma talk 1/10/15

Source materials:
Suzuki Roshi
Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind

Abbess Zenkei Blanche Hartman
"Beginner's Mind"

Beginners mind: " in the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few."

The trinity: craving, delusion and aversion.
Craving and aversion announce themselves with their discontent..
The hardest to spot is delusion...most subtle, ubiquitous...all presumption, all fixed ideas, our whole world view is potentially deluded.

Without a friend to sit with us to point out our delusions, how are we to see them, when they are the very fabric of how we put together a world?

Once in a while we get jolted awake.

When I was 5 I was skipping gladly down my sunny suburban street going to visit my friend Jimmy. I liked Jimmy. He was really nice. His mom was in the front yard gardening. When she saw me, she stood up and smiled and said "Hi, Rhonda, what do you know?" I was seized in a panic. What did I know, and how did I know it was really true?

That moment was a gift.

We all have moments that shock us into the realization that we know nothing to be absolutely true. The harder work is to discover it in a fruitful, on-going basis....to cultivate the spunk and the curiosity to take a clear look at the process of fabrication of a world.

Beginners's mind is the bedrock....it is the view without preconceptions....
Here it is our job is to become wise to our preconceptions...hold them up to light when we stumble upon them, or look for them....is this true, absolutely true?

The "who" and the "what"...the fluid answer is always: "this" (Mi, Zot)

"Not only so" writes Suzuki Roshi

or "the opposite is always true"

We want to expose the habits of our small mind as habits...this is the lab.

We want to cultivate the awareness of beginner's mind, which is already present.
The know-nothing position

Today we can assume that all that the mind devises is a construct, a habit of perception....this does not just belong to the habits of the discursive mind, the explaining mind, the spin doctor....but is true for all phenomena....familiar patterns of emotional and physical reactivity.

We want to watch the mental habits without trying to control them.

We want to watch while giving the mind lots of space.

We are not going to try becoming dull and ignore the mind

We are not going to bear down hard and try to control the mind.

We are going to give the mind all the space it needs, the entire field of the body.
(p. 15)

There are certain mistakes in practice which come with natural consequences. Those consequences become helpful signs.

When your practice is greedy, you will become discouraged. That discouragement is a helpful sign to point out your greed. You can be grateful that you have this sign, or warning signal.

When you are idealistic about practice, you will always fall short of "attainment", and get lost in a competition for what is not present. If you strive for perfect faith or an idealized practice, it is based on some self-centered notion, and there will be disappointment.

Our practice can not be perfect. Don't be discouraged by this. It is actually the secret of practice.

Any conflict that comes up in practice is because of some fixed or one-sided idea, some delusion.
(p.57)

The quality of the state of mind is the practice.
(p. 93)

We are not going to stop the activities of mind. We remember that mind pervades our whole body. With your full mind" we sit here, embodied. The mind needs lots of space, not narrow control.

(p. 25)

(From Blanche Hartman article on Beginners Mind:)

We move to the freedom of not knowing.

We move away from the dualism of certainty and delusion.

We move away from the dullness of not knowing, of ignorance.

We move toward toward the intimacy and the immediacy of open readiness and curiosity.

(Paraphrased)

A Buddhist story:

"In China there was a teacher...who had a student...the student saw the teacher dressed in his traveling clothes, with his straw sandals and his staff, and a pack on his back, and the student asked 'where are you going?'

The teacher responded, 'Around on a pilgrimage.'

'What is the purpose of your pilgrimage?' asked the student.

'I don't know. Not knowing is nearest' (most intimate)

We are curious.

We are interested.

Beginner's mind.

We get a front row seat on the breath, as if we have never felt it before.

Our habitual state of mind and does not have much to do with what is right in front of us. We get intimate with the immediacy of this breath, this sensation.

Let the practice be embodied fully.

Let wisdom flow through the heart rather than worrying about what you know and the important things you have learned.

"Right here is the peak of the mystic mountain." "Just this is it."

Approaching everything with beginners mind, with an open mind, the mind that is questioning and looking and listening and hearing and seeing and feeling and smelling without prejudgement, without preconception, without fixed views. Open. Ready to see what is right here. Open to see "What is this?" and ready to let it flower, ready to let it bloom in the world."

Mary Oliver
When Death Comes

"When it's over, I want to say: all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was a bridegroom, taking the world into my arms."

This is beginners mind, fully alive, curious, interested.

She goes on to write:

"When it's over, I don't want to wonder
if I have made of my life something particular, and real.
I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened
or full of argument.

I don't want to end up simply having visited this world."

"I the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few."
Suzuki Roshi

When Death Comes – A Poem by Mary Oliver

When death comes
like the hungry bear in autumn
when death comes and takes all the bright coins from his purse

to buy me, and snaps his purse shut;
when death comes
like the measles-pox;

when death comes
like an iceberg between the shoulder blades,

I want to step through the door full of curiosity, wondering;
what is it going to be like, that cottage of darkness?

And therefore I look upon everything
as a brotherhood and a sisterhood,
and I look upon time as no more than an idea,
and I consider eternity as another possibility,

and I think of each life as a flower, as common
as a field daisy, and as singular,

and each name a comfortable music in the mouth
tending as all music does, toward silence,

and each body a lion of courage, and something
precious to the earth.

When it's over, I want to say: all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was a bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.

When it's over, I don't want to wonder
if I have made of my life something particular, and real.
I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened
or full of argument.

I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.

~ Mary Oliver ~