

Beginners Mind

Purpose:

To encourage us all to look toward the receiving of information with freshness and open our thinking when hearing from others; to absorb information as if it was never heard before.

Beginner's mind:

"Sho shin" is a concept of Zen Buddhism, meaning "beginner's mind". It refers to having a desire to learn, attitude of openness, patience, and a lack of preconceptions, even when studying at an advanced level. The beginner's mind is a mind thinking in the "now." It doesn't ask you to believe in anything in particular. It simply says put aside the beliefs you already have for a little while and do the exercises the teacher suggests and experience without expectations. Beginner's mind is recognizing that this wonderful, intellectual, thinking mind that we all have, may at certain times distort and block things from view. If we consciously set aside this effect on purpose and adopt "I don't know" as a strategy, then secrets are allowed to be known and treasures can be found.

Most of us have a hard time opening up and truly listening to what could be and instead we use our prejudice and past experiences to identify what is in front of us. We lose something vital in our lives when it becomes more important for us to be "the one who knows" rather than being open and accessible to what is happening to us at this very moment. As stated in *Listening for Treasures in the Wind*, "another attribute needed for True Listening is that a person be willing to recognize that they might not know the answer to certain questions - (thus) to be a lifelong learner."

A beginner's mind is a mind that "TRULY LISTENS" (phrase taken from "*Listening for Treasures in the Wind*"). When we listen, truly listen, we are using the beginner's mind because we follow the other person as they express their emotions and thoughts. The beginner's mind takes "things as they are" and often is willing to follow another's direction.

Thus, following the speaker's mind comes closer to reality than other forms of focus because we truly do not know what is going on in the other person's mind. Even if we heard them speak on the same subject recently, time has evolved and occurrences have taken place that might have changed the speaker's mind and feelings. We, the listeners, might even be looking through a different mindset or different set of emotions that day. With the beginner's mind, each engagement is taken on an individual basis and explored for what it is at that moment in time. The very nature of beginner's mind is not being an expert.

Quote from "Zen Mind" by Shunryu Suzuki:

"In the beginner's mind, there are many possibilities.
In the expert's mind, there are very few."

A story extended by a Zen Master seems to fit as a closing:

A university professor went to visit a famous Zen master. While the master quietly served tea, the professor talked about Zen. The master poured the visitor's cup to the brim, and then kept going. The professor watched the overflowing cup until he could no longer restrain himself. "It's overfull! No more will go in!" the professor blurted. "You are like this cup," the master replied, "How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup."

It could be said that intimacy is more likely to spring forth with the beginner's mind.

This exercise may help you to develop the Beginner's Mind:

The next time you enter an environment of learning, say to yourself: "I will focus on the speaker with an open mind and look for new insights and thoughts in all that is presented regardless if the information is new or ideas I have heard before."

Resources:

Listening For Treasures In The Wind, by Ron Collins (see the "writings" page of this website for details about Ron's book)

Beginner's Mind by Abbess Zenkei Blanche Hartman

Beginner's Mind by Darren Hanson (www.ironpalm.com)

Beginner's Mind by Garr Reynolds (futura.edublogs.org)