

Seriousness is misunderstood. To be serious one must be childlike. What is often called serious is simply justified ignorance.

-Heraclitus



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Beginner's Mind



Our entire lives are spent, literally spent, wandering, wondering. Some people have attached themselves to various worldviews of life and subsequent careers that they believe best serve those ends. The universe is infinitely vast, moving towards a darkness, or some say a light. Scientists spend their time changing their minds. Mathematicians spend their time quantifying. Lawyers spend their time drawing lines in the sand. Teachers spend their time existing in a space called patience, doing the best they can to help our kids adjust. So, what am I trying to get across... nothing really, just that we all have time.

“No one can ever step in the same river twice, for upon taking the second step it's not the same river, nor they the same person,” says Heraclitus. What a terribly beautiful quote. Our minds tend toward the belief that there is such a thing as two. Though in reality there is no two, only numerous ones. Two is our first attempt to make sense of time and space, though a misperception.

Finding one's place in time and space is the journey of return to being childlike. Being curious is where you want to set up your tent and explore. “The only constant is change,” Heraclitus echoes from the dark to remind us. All is practice. All is learning. In truth, everyday we are learning. No matter what your job is, remember, you are simply practicing. This is what Eastern philosophy calls “beginners mind.” In reality, it is a perception of direct cognition, prior to knowing, in truth it is disciplined unknowing. For clarity sake, the antonym would be cynicism.

Shoshin (初心) is a word from Zen Buddhism which means "beginner's mind". It refers to having an attitude of openness, eagerness, and lack of preconceptions when studying a subject, even when studying at an advanced level, just as a beginner in that subject would. A lot easier said than done. When day in and day out you do the same job, it is easy to fall into the trap of quantifying your work. This quantifying is what kills “beginners mind.”

Last month I wrote, “Science is dead. We killed it. Haven't you heard?” This ambiguous statement was intended as a question. To a child everything is new. This newness is what keeps us in a state of awe, though as we further define things in life and learn the number two, we begin the process of categorizing. Zen teacher Shunryu Suzuki, says the following about understanding Shoshin, "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, in the expert's mind few." Do not fall into the trap of becoming cynical, its not easy to cure... yet here's a clue: the antidote is curiosity.

The Blind Men and the Elephant

It was six men of Indostan
 To learning much inclined,
 Who went to see the Elephant
 (Though all of them were blind),
 That each by observation
 Might satisfy his mind.

The *First* approach'd the Elephant,
 And happening to fall
 Against his broad and sturdy side,
 At once began to bawl:
 "God bless me! but the Elephant
 Is very like a WALL!"

The *Second*, feeling of the tusk,
 Cried, -"Ho! what have we here
 So very round and smooth and sharp?
 To me 'tis mighty clear
 This wonder of an Elephant
 Is very like a SPEAR!"

The *Third* approached the animal,
 And happening to take
 The squirming trunk within his hands,
 Thus boldly up and spake:
 "I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
 Is very like a SNAKE!"

The *Fourth* reached out his eager hand,
 And felt about the knee.
 "What most this wondrous beast is like
 Is mighty plain," quoth he,
 "'Tis clear enough the Elephant
 Is very like a TREE!"

The *Fifth*, who chanced to touch the ear,
 Said: "E'en the blindest man
 Can tell what this resembles most;
 Deny the fact who can,
 This marvel of an Elephant
 Is very like a FAN!"

The *Sixth* no sooner had begun
 About the beast to grope,
 Then, seizing on the swinging tail
 That fell within his scope,
 "I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
 Is very like a ROPE!"

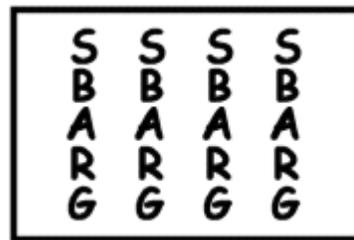
And so these men of Indostan
 Disputed loud and long,
 Each in his own opinion
 Exceeding stiff and strong,
 Though each was partly in the right,
 And all were in the wrong.



Mughal painting, from the 1600s AD

Rebus Challenge: Can you decode?

1. What does this rebus mean?
 CCCCCC
2. What does this Rebus say?
 ISSUES ISSUES
 ISSUES ISSUES
 ISSUES ISSUES
 ISSUES ISSUES
3. What does this rebus puzzle mean?
 or nothing
 or nothing
4. What common phrase does this Rebus says ?



5. What does this Rebus Image Riddle Say?

