

To Begin Again

by MaryBeth Smith, GCFP

The year is new, still shiny, no dents in it, fresh off the showroom floor, with that New Year smell. I was chatting with a friend the other day around the idea of resolutions and planning the year, figuring out how each of us would move forward on projects and intentions. My friend briefly shared the situation of one of his clients, who had recently experienced a series of setbacks in her business. She was going to have to start over, he said. But, having created a successful business before, she knew the process and could rebuild using the same steps.

I know the feeling and the experience of starting over. When one endures losses and leaves an old way of life behind, the prospect of “starting over” is daunting. As I reflected more, it came to me that I sense a subtle difference between two ideas that seem the same on the surface. My visceral response is qualitatively different when I think, “Start over,” compared to when I think, “Begin again.” Do those feel different to you?

When I think “Start over,” I think of poor Sisyphus pushing the gigantic boulder up the hill – only to slide back to the very bottom again and again. Indeed, “Backsliding” has some judgment loaded into it. Stop! Everything you just did was wrong. Irredeemable. Trash it. You’ll have to start over. I hear the voice of my old

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piano teacher, or some other authority figure who knew the standard and determined that I had not met it.

But “Begin again” feels better somehow. Whatever I did before, even if it didn’t work, contains nuggets of information and learning that I can build upon, fine-tune, and improve. “Begin again” doesn’t stipulate WHAT I am to begin – it could be something entirely different, just begin. “Start over” makes it likely that I will make the same mistakes, because I am doing the same thing, again. Begin something, anything. Don’t stop beginning. When I begin again, I do it at my own pace and in my own way, not compelled by some outer influence.

The Feldenkrais Method® of somatic education has within it the notion of being a beginner every time one comes to practice. In it, one is a beginner every day, because there is always something new to learn, always a new circumstance to adapt to, always a different constraint or “wrinkle” in the system that wasn’t there before. Even the expert or master teacher is a beginner, having become expert at beginning. We work according to an iterative process: begin a movement. Begin it again, and add to it. Begin again, and vary it in some way. Through the process of many beginnings, improvements emerge and grow. In the Feldenkrais Method, there’s no need to reach the pinnacle of achievement or the height of one’s potential on the first attempt. We’re in it for the duration. Successive approximations, baby steps, will get us there.



One comes to understand the Zen idea of “the beginner’s mind.” In one way, a beginner is a novice, an innocent, someone with humility because they have no expertise or prior knowledge in the domain they are studying. This freedom from preconceptions enables one to see things with fresh eyes. The beginner comes with an “empty cup,” an open mind, ready to learn. My understanding of the beginner’s mind has evolved to include another aspiration: a beginner is one who begins, who makes beginnings like a potter makes pots, or a watchmaker makes watches. A beginner is someone who is willing to move out of physical, emotional, or ideological stasis and begin on some path, even if it’s not perfect. You can always adjust the course as you go.

How does one think before beginning? The mind of one who begins things is creative and courageous. In the face of seeming failure, of discouragement, or confusion, one can always make a new beginning.

What would you like to begin?

Listen to a short audio lesson by MaryBeth Smith, “[How Do You Begin?](#)”

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