

June Theme

Beginning: The Practice of Creation

Every human is an artist. And this is the main art that we have: the creation of our story.

-Don Miguel Ruiz

Introduction

To change, to begin a new path from that which we are on, is a courageous act, foundational to being human. We always have the opportunity to forge a new direction and embark on a new journey: it can change the course of a life, or history altogether. Imagine if Gandhi had not pursued non-violent resistance, or if Henry David Thoreau decided not to live in the woods? These beginnings, these acts of creation, lead to important new stories which impacted the course of our history.

Living within the confined attitudes and interactions of our tightly held assumptions is the opposite of creation; we rely on stale paradigms that keeps our minds closed and the scope of our lives narrow. When we release from these paradigms, we can instead show up in the world with the fresh mind of a child- open to wonder, imagination, and new beginnings. Fully actualizing creation in our lives requires this conscious and intentional release from old assumptions. As David Whyte explains, this courageous step is simpler and more radical than we had thought. The destruction of what *was* and the unfolding of what *is* lead us to endless possibilities.

Everything begins: people, work, relationships, projects and tasks all start somewhere in time and space. How we choose, or are chosen, to begin may feel purposeful or passive: the term *creation*, with its implicit allusion to divine inspiration or intervention, reminds us of the sacred nature of beginning. *Beginning* may seem a more mundane action that must be taken and re-taken. There are willful beginnings- actions taken, decisions made- and others that feel bestowed. In either case, the common denominator is willingness, an openness to acknowledging defeat without hopelessness, and an ever-renewing sense of possibility.

The intangibility of so many beginnings- the chicken or the egg? Conception or birth? All of this means that beginnings are often mental constructs, a shifted attitude or new thought that demarcates a phase or action as fresh, new. In this way, we all have infinite capacity to begin again every moment of every day: we create, by our interpretations of our lived experiences, new stories of ourselves and of the world, and thus can punctuate freely, placing commas and periods, to signal to ourselves and others new directions. In all the random and unpredictable happenings of our lives, we, ourselves, have total creative license to construct meaning, grow relationships, choose our responses and actions to circumstances as they arise.

Questions for discussion and discernment on your own, or with each other:

1. What is the relationship between new beginnings and creation?
2. Must there be an ending for there to be a new beginning? And if you're beginning, must there be an ending to this too?
3. What was/is one of your favorite beginnings? What beginning was challenging for you?
4. How do you begin again? What is the value and the burden of these repetitious restarts?
5. Is there something you wish you could begin again? How would you hope this would change the experience?
6. Have you ever experienced a significant event that lead to an unexpected creation and/or new beginning?
7. What factors support new beginnings? And what impedes them?

This month's theme was composed by Erin Collier, Jen Ryan Brown and the Worship Associates.

8. Is anything ever created from nothing?
9. What do you enjoy creating?

Quotes and Short Readings

What we call the beginning is often the end. And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from. - *T.S. Eliot*

The artist is always beginning. Any work of art which is not a beginning, an invention, a discovery is of little worth. - *Ezra Pound*

Everything we do is an act of poetry or a painting if we do it with mindfulness. Growing lettuce is poetry. Walking to the supermarket can be a painting. -*Thich Nhat Hanh*

New beginnings are often disguised as painful endings. -*Lao Tzu*

Words have Power. Words created this universe.... Everything started with the word. The Bible says, 'In the beginning was the word.' In the same way, your words have creative power.
- *Bo Sanchez*

First comes thought; then organization of that thought, into ideas and plans; then transformation of those plans into reality. The beginning, as you will observe, is in your imagination.
-*Napoleon Hill*

The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn. -*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

There is nothing to fear in the act of beginning. More often than not it knows the journey ahead better than we ever could. Perhaps the art of harvesting the secret riches of our lives is best achieved when we place profound trust in the act of beginning. Risk might be our greatest ally. To live a truly creative life, we always need to cast a critical look at where we presently are, attempting always to discern where we have become stagnant and where new beginning might be ripening. There can be no growth if we do not remain open and vulnerable to what is new and different. I have never seen anyone take a risk for growth that was not rewarded a thousand times over.

-*John O'Donohue, from BENEDICTUS (Europe) /TO BLESS THE SPACE BETWEEN US (US)*

Millions of men have lived to fight, build palaces and boundaries, shape destinies and societies; but the compelling force of all times has been the force of originality and creation profoundly affecting the roots of human spirit. -*Ansel Adams*

Every act of creation is first an act of destruction. -*Pablo Picasso*

God wants us to know that life is a series of beginnings, not endings. Just as graduations are not terminations, but commencements. Creation is an ongoing process, and when we create a perfect world where love and compassion are shared by all, suffering will cease. -*Bernie Siegel*

On Meeting a Stranger

The Worship Associates are: Jen Ryan Brown, Alexandra Businger (chair), Alan Cantor, Erin Collier, Jess Jonas, Katherine McHugh, Megan Momtaheni, and Gary Strichartz.

With respect
And reverence
That the unknown
Between us
Might flower
Into discovery
And lead us
Beyond
The familiar field
Blind with the weed
Of weariness
And the old walls
Of habit.
-John O'Donohue

If we make a commitment to living in the present moment, we are always “at the beginning” of whatever it is we are doing, constantly presented with thoughts, judgments, observations, and/or sensations that interrupt up us amidst our daily activities. The challenge is in the choice to accept these things and simply “begin” again, returning to the present moment, or to grip tightly to some idea of what we should be doing and flood ourselves with judgment in the process.-
-Sharon Salzberg, from OnBeing blog 'Simple but Not Easy: the Right Effort of Beginning Again'

The mystery of the beginning of all things is insoluble by us; and I for one must be content to remain agnostic. *-Charles Darwin*

Beginning well or beginning poorly, what is important is simply to begin, but the ability to make a good beginning is also an art form. Beginning well involves a clearing away of the crass, the irrelevant and the complicated to find the beautiful, often hidden lineaments of the essential and the necessary.

Beginning is difficult, and our procrastination is a fine ever-present measure of our reluctance in taking that first close-in, courageous step to reclaiming our happiness. Perhaps, because taking a new step always leads to a kind of radical internal simplification, where, suddenly, very large parts of us, parts of us we have kept gainfully employed for years, parts of us still rehearsing the old complicated story, are suddenly out of a job. There occurs in effect, a form of internal corporate downsizing, where the parts of us too afraid to participate or having nothing new to offer, are let go, with all of the accompanying death-like trauma, and where the very last fight occurs, a rear guard disbelief that this new, less complicated self, and this very simple step, is all that is needed for the new possibilities ahead.

It is always hard to believe that the courageous step is so close to us, that it is closer than we ever could imagine, that in fact, we already know what it is, and that the step is simpler, more radical than we had thought: which is why we so often prefer the story to be more elaborate, our identities clouded by fear, the horizon safely in the distance, the essay longer than it needs to be and the answer safely in the realm of impossibility.

-David Whyte

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I do not think there is any thrill that can go through the human heart like that felt by the inventor as he sees some creation of the brain unfolding to success....such emotions make a man forget food, sleep, friends, love, everything. -*Nikola Tesla*

The Beginning

"Where have I come from, where did you pick me up?" the baby asked its mother.

She answered, half crying, half laughing, and clasping the baby to her breast-

"You were hidden in my heart as its desire, my darling.

You were in the dolls of my childhood's games; and when with clay I made the image of my god every morning, I made the unmade you then.

You were enshrined with our household deity, in his worship I worshipped you.

In all my hopes and my loves, in my life, in the life of my mother you have lived.

In the lap of the deathless Spirit who rules our home you have been nursed for ages.

When in girlhood my heart was opening its petals, you hovered as a fragrance about it.

Your tender softness bloomed in my youthful limbs, like a glow in the sky before the sunrise.

Heaven's first darling, twain-born with the morning light, you have floated down the stream of the world's life, and at last you have stranded on my heart.

As I gaze on your face, mystery overwhelms me; you who belong to all have become mine.

For fear of losing you I hold you tight to my breast. What magic has snared the world's treasure in these slender arms of Mine?"

-Rabindranath Tagore

START CLOSE IN

Start close in,

don't take the second step

or the third,

start with the first

thing

close in,

the step you don't want to take.

Start with
the ground

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you know,
the pale ground
beneath your feet,
your own
way of starting
the conversation.

Start with your own
question,
give up on other
people's questions,
don't let them
smother something
simple.

To find
another's voice
follow
your own voice,
wait until
that voice
becomes a
private ear
listening
to another.

Start right now
take a small step
you can call your own
don't follow
someone else's
heroics, be humble
and focused,
start close in,
don't mistake
that other
for your own.

*Start close in,
don't take the second step
or the third,
start with the first
thing
close in,
the step you don't want to take.*

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~ David Whyte ~
(*River Flow*)

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