Beginner’s Mind

It tends to be a momentous occasion to intentionally stop all your outward activity and, just as an experiment, sit or lie down and open to an interior stillness with no other agenda than to be present for the unfolding of your moments—perhaps for the first time in your adult life.

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The people I know who have incorporated the practice of mindfulness into their lives remember quite vividly what drew them to it in the first place, including the feeling tone and life circumstances that led up to that moment of beginning. I certainly do. The emotional topology of the moment of beginning—or even of the moment of realizing that you want to connect with yourself in such a way—is rich and unique for each of us.

Suzuki Roshi, the Japanese Zen Master who founded the San Francisco Zen Center and touched the hearts of so many, is famous for having said, “In the beginner’s mind, there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s there are few.” Beginners come to new experiences not knowing so much and therefore open. This openness is very creative. It is an innate characteristic of the mind. The trick is never to lose it. That would require that you stay in the ever-emerging wonder of the present moment, which is always fresh. Of course you will lose beginner’s mind in one way, when you cease to be a beginner. But if you can remember from time to time that each moment is fresh and
new, maybe, just maybe, what you know will not get in the way of being open to what you don't know, which is always a larger field. Then a beginner's mind will be available in any moment you are open to it.