

The Be Well Place

January 2023



New beginnings...again

The other day, my kindergartner pranced around the house singing that “Michael Finnegan” song, and naturally, I started thinking about “beginning again.”

Do you know the song? It’s one of those catchy childhood rhymes that sticks in your head and has an unexpected morbid ending. (We’ll discuss the dark and morbid stories embedded in nursery rhymes another time.)

*“There was an old man named Michael Finnegan.
He grew fat and then grew thin again.
Then he died and had to begin again.
Poor old Michael Finnegan. Begin again.”*

And then you keep singing the song over and over and over until one of your parent’s heads’ explodes. I did that a lot to my parents when I was a kid.

These days, I focus less on the annoying repetition and more on the fact that good ol’ Michael Finnegan had to begin again every time the song ended. It’s inspiring, really. The man was reborn with each iteration despite each parental cringe. (He was also a swing dieter, apparently.)

We, too, can begin again in each and every single moment of our lives. But we don’t have to wait until the end of a song or the end of a year. We don’t have to wait until the sun comes up tomorrow. We can begin again right now. And now. And again.

Each moment is another opportunity to realign our thoughts, feelings, decisions, words, and actions with our values. And it’s another opportunity to evaluate our values to make sure they’re actually important to us.

Consider this moment right now. What thoughts are you thinking? What feelings do you have? What decisions, words, and actions are you about to deliver? Do they align with your values? And are your values really that important to you? If not, then this is the moment to “begin again.”

Be well,

Rachael

Lighten up, loosen up

It rarely feels good when people tell us to “lighten up.” And the exact opposite usually happens. We’re more likely to tighten our grip and bear down harder than heed such unsolicited advice.

But despite people’s intentions when they tell us to lighten up or loosen up, there’s a lot of wisdom in those sayings.

Whenever we feel anger, frustration, resentment, embarrassment, guilt, shame, or (insert your favorite emotion here), we tend to grasp at it. We don’t just recognize our emotional response. We don’t just feel the feelings and let them go. No, we grab them and hold them tightly for safety like stuffed teddy bears that arm us against the dark and scary night.

We tend to cling to our feelings and let them run rampant throughout our system, hijacking our otherwise rational thoughts and otherwise functional organs.

Then, we wonder why we have headaches, digestion issues, stiff necks, and aching backs. We wonder why we can’t sleep, can’t focus, and can’t find the motivation to do what brings us joy.

Maybe we do need to lighten up. Maybe we need to loosen our grip on those feelings and just allow ourselves to feel them without making them who we are.

We *feel* anger. We don’t have to *be* angry. But the tighter we grasp at anger, the more we identify with it, and the more it consumes our being.

Same with sadness, embarrassment, guilt, and shame.

We latch onto such feelings until we can no longer separate them from ourselves. And then we get so disoriented that it becomes so easy to



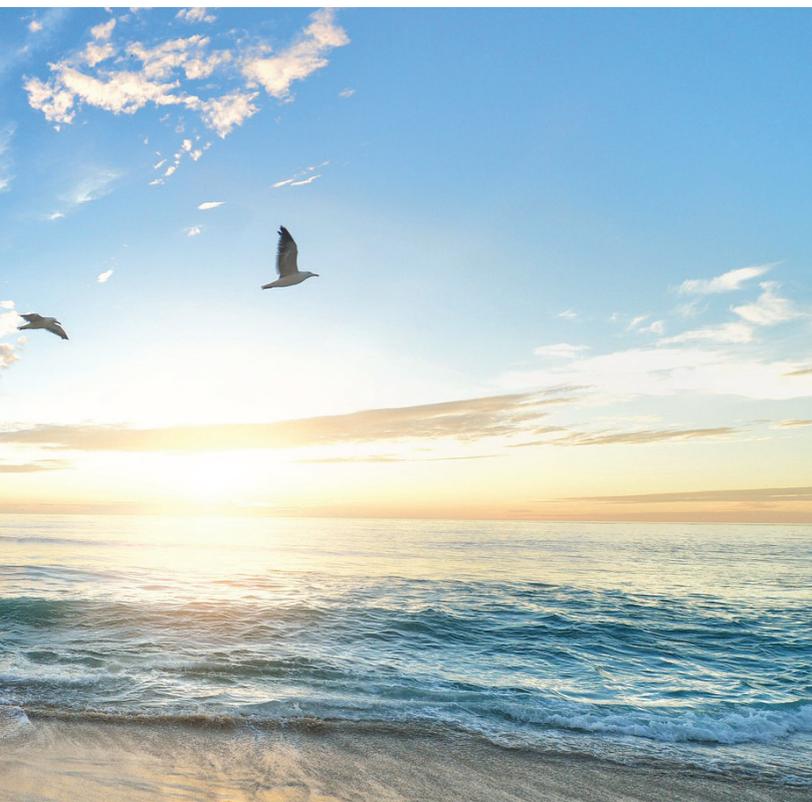
blame everything external for our unfortunate emotional state. Our feelings quickly become everyone else’s responsibility since they’re the ones who initiated them.

Right? Nah...

We know we’re responsible for our own feelings. We know that we’re the only ones who can truly control our thoughts and emotions — which can get pretty heavy and overwhelming. So, sometimes it’s easier to give up than do the hard work to process them in a helpful way.

But eventually, our inaction catches up with us and we find ourselves buried within a heap of emotions, unable to breathe let alone reach out an arm to hoist ourselves up. It’s like leaving dirty dishes in the sink for a week and having to set aside an hour to clean up the mess, instead of just washing things quickly after we dirty them. Letting a small task go unattended leads to a big pile that we later need to put in a great deal of effort to correct.

Managing feelings is like doing the dishes. If we process them bit by bit, they’re less likely



to become a mound that's more difficult to dismantle.

Though some things like dishes require a good grip to prevent slippage, our feelings do not. We do not need to hold onto feelings for fear of losing or breaking them. If we let go of a dish, it may shatter, and then we're without a plate. If we let go of a feeling, it disintegrates, and then we're without its suffering.

So, let's drop our emotional dishes and let them shatter into pieces. Let's loosen up our grip so that our feelings can unravel and free themselves from our grasp.

Or to summarize what Aldous Huxley wrote in his novel, *Island*: let's lighten up, my darlings. •

"It's dark because you are trying too hard.

Lightly child, lightly. Learn to do everything lightly

Yes, feel lightly even though you're feeling deeply

Just lightly let things happen and lightly cope with them...

So throw away your baggage and go forward

There are quicksands all about you, sucking at your feet,

trying to suck you down into fear and self-pity and despair.

That's why you must walk so lightly.

Lightly my darling,

on tiptoes and no luggage,

not even a sponge bag,

completely unencumbered."

— Aldous Huxley, *Island*

Let it be enough

Every weekend I say to myself, “I wish I had one more day.” When I meet someone interesting on an airplane I think, “I’d like to hang out with this person again.” Every time I taste something delicious, I want one more bite. On days when I look and feel my best, I desire to look and feel that way every day.

I want to hold onto what is pleasing and multiply it. I want more.

This is a dangerous way of thinking, however. When we get caught in the self-perpetuating spiral of wanting and craving, we reliably end up disappointed, empty, and incomplete.

We must learn to let our experiences be enough — even the good ones.

Let go of happy times

It’s strange to think that holding onto happy memories can cause discomfort. And it’s often helpful to remember the good times and channel our warm-fuzzy feelings as motivation and fond reminders.

But holding onto good experiences so much that we cling to the past and grasp for more is the same as holding onto bad experiences. It’s the same thought process and the same attachment behavior.

In order to truly release negative thoughts and feelings from our beings, we must learn to release positive thoughts and feelings, too, so they don’t sour us and become sources of suffering.

We are bound to experience both happiness and sadness to varying degrees, and there’s nothing inherently wrong with either.

But when we attach ourselves to happiness or sadness, we surrender our sovereignty to circumstance and are no longer able to live in peace exactly where we are. We get stuck wanting things to remain the same or wanting them to be dramatically different.

I find that when I feel grateful for an experience (good or bad), I’m able to let it be enough without wanting more or less.

I focus on how wonderful it was to learn something new or test myself. I recognize that I grew and changed slightly because of the experience and am better equipped to face similar experiences in the future.

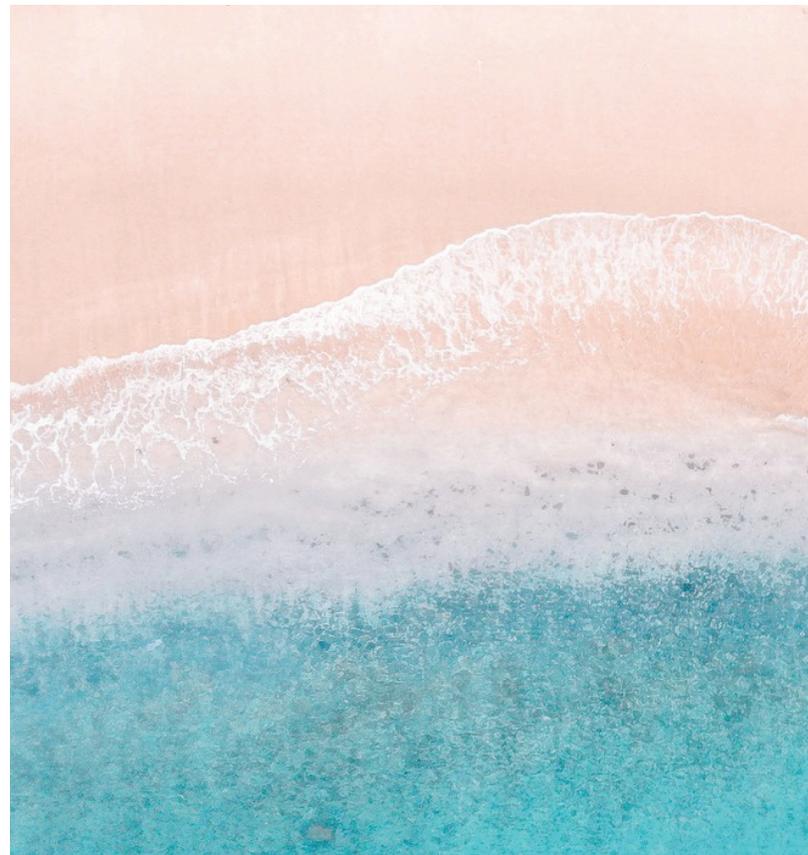
But of course, I’m not always successful.

There will still be days of dwelling

Let’s work on letting our experiences be enough, but let’s also give ourselves some slack.

Being human means that we will mess up sometimes (or many times). And that’s totally okay.

Let’s not dwell on the times when we couldn’t detach ourselves and still craved more and more. Let’s just let those feelings of wanting run their course, intercepting our thoughts when we can, and once we gain control over our minds again, let’s set that whole dwelling thing aside and get back to the present.



So, not only must we let our experiences be enough, we must also let our efforts in “letting it be enough” be enough in order to continue our way through life in the present.

Reflect (but not too long)

Think about something that lingers in your mind. It may be an event, a friendship, a first-place trophy, or a vacation.

How much mental energy do you spend wanting that experience to happen again? How much do you define yourself based on that experience?

Practice mentally setting that experience aside. Picture it vividly in your mind, and then imagine yourself holding the experience in your hands and setting it down on the ground beside you. Then look away from it.

Be grateful that you had that experience and regain focus on the present moment so that you can live the experience you are currently in. •

“Existence is no more than the precarious attainment of relevance in an intensely mobile flux of past, present, and future.”

— Susan Sontag

Embracing the new

To live is to be in an ongoing state of change. Nothing is ever the same. Nothing is static. Everything is moving. Everything is in flux.

We can hold on to the familiar for a little while, especially if it aligns with our life path. But at some point, we'll have to let it go and embrace the new — even if it's rooted in joy and love.

See, if we cling too long to anything, we stagnate. We stop changing. We stop growing. We stop living.

We don't need to rush through life or keep busy just for the sake of doing. But when it's time to let go, we need to let go so that we can continually welcome life into our lives.

