

## My Meditation Practice

Deep peace on the running wave to you  
Deep peace on the flowing air to you  
Deep peace on the quiet earth to you  
Deep peace of the shining stars to you  
Deep peace on the gentle night to you  
Moon and stars pour their healing light on you  
Deep peace to you  
Traditional Gaelic Blessing

Saturday morning. *Rob shares the experience of his daily meditation practice to show that meditation is not mystical or otherworldly and that meditating has been helpful in his life as an oncologist.*

Over a decade ago Tim taught me how to meditate. Most mornings I get up forty minutes earlier than I would have otherwise, go downstairs to my meditation area, kneel down on a couple of pillows and assume a straight and comfortable posture. I bring my attention to my breathing and the sensations of my body. Typically, about two seconds after starting, my mind starts to drift off and I begin to think about something else. Usually I start planning what I need to do that day: the jobs that have to get done, the people I need to talk to, what I will say at a particular meeting. At some point, sometimes minutes later, I realize that I am thinking about the future and not mindfully attending to my breath or my body. Noticing this, without judgment, I simply bring my attention back to my breath.

A few seconds later my chattering mind starts up again. I might think about what happened the previous day: what I should have said in a particular conversation, how guilty or embarrassed I felt about my actions. I replay these scenes in my mind thinking about alternate endings. Eventually I realize I'm thinking about the past and not focusing on the

present. Again I'm very gentle on myself and I bring my attention back to breathing. Back and forth it goes – dozens of times within that forty minutes: I'm mindfully focused on breathing, I'm off thinking, I'm mindfully focused again, I'm off thinking.....

Sometimes at about the thirty minute point, something snaps in me and suddenly I feel like I'm sinking into my body right in the here and now. I can experience a deep feeling of peace, relaxation and spaciousness.

Interestingly, my chattering mind does not stop chattering at that point. In some way though, it seems not to chat so loudly, or perhaps, I am less concerned and less invested in the dramas of my own thoughts. Then I feel generally more present, even though the thoughts still come and go.

On the days when I do meditate in the morning I feel more peaceful and grounded throughout my day. I am better able to listen to the person in front of me in the cancer centre and at home with my family. My innate caring and compassion comes out more when I meditate regularly.

Meditating makes me a better doctor and, paradoxically, despite feeling calm and relaxed, I'm much more efficient. I do one thing at a time and my day seems to flow more easily. I can focus on the details as well as see the bigger picture, including how my emotions rise and fall without being caught up in them.

Over the years not much has changed as I practice each morning. Some mornings, I settle into being present sooner and I'm better able to see the thoughts coming and going undisturbed. Other mornings, I get taken off on long stories in my mind and remain agitated. But whether the experience of meditation goes well or not, I keep coming back to it.

A few years ago, I realized that I was practicing the same skill of mindfulness meditation throughout the day. As I was talking to someone I would catch myself thinking about something else completely. I wasn't paying attention to the person or what was happening in the situation. In the same way that I bring my attention back to my breathing during the morning meditation, I would simply refocus my attention on the person and the situation. The same sequence of being caught up in my mind, thinking of something else, realizing it, then re-focusing on the moment, happens all day long.

With practice I am remaining more in the present throughout my life. I am better able to pay attention to my body, receiving its feedback so I can take better care of myself. I'm more in touch with my emotions so that they are less likely to negatively influence how I treat others. And

meditation has allowed me to see that my thoughts come and go. I am better able to let them just be, without getting caught up in strategies for their future or reliving new versions of stories from the past.

Meditation has made me a better person. I am forever more grateful to Tim for teaching me to be kind to myself and to recognize my own wholeness.