

(Continued from page 3)

a formula, developed by Machiavelli and a labor lawyer from the state no doubt; read it in the PSA contract, page eighteen. It basically and confusingly states you receive nothing for hours up to 390. Between 390 hours and 630 hours, which is 240 hours, you receive half pay. Or put another way, you get paid fifty cents on the dollar. If you have over 630 hours and up to the maximum of 875 hours, you receive seventy-five cents on the dollar. It is healthy not to fret over it, many people don't receive anything for unused sick time, look at the glass as being half full. Now for those with SDP hours still on the books, you will receive full pay at today's rate, not at the rate you deferred it way back when.

Back to your research on how much money you feel is "sufficient" for you and your loved ones. I suggest that you go outside the box and look at things like refinancing your home if you own one. Look at other ways to use the money you have in TIAA-CREF. Seek advice on health care options. Compile all of your other resources: land, stocks, etc. Evaluate your health and the health of those who look to you for financial support. Contact AARP and AFT and other insurance providers, and get information concerning available health coverage. Look at long-term health care insurance, such as nursing home costs. Look at paid-up insurance you bought years ago that may be unnecessary at this stage of your life. And lastly, if you plan to buy a computer soon after retirement, think about buying it before you retire, so you can use the purchasing power of the College to your benefit. If there are other purchases you can think of that can offer you savings before you retire, pre-retirement is the time to do so. Things are very different, very quickly. (Commuting, alarms, stress, weekends, tea time and tee times). ■

—Brian Allen

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THE PSA@RIC REPORT

The Professional Staff Association at Rhode Island College

EQUAL PARTNERS IN EDUCATION

March 2005



PROFILES OF OUR PROFESSIONALS

AN INTERVIEW WITH TOM LAVIN



The lights are off. The only illumination in the room is the winter sky filling a wall-length window. Lavender chairs are arranged in a circle, and a round coffee table sits in the middle, close enough to prop the soles of your shoes. It is a wonderful room, not large but immensely peaceful. Six of us have come here, chosen to meet here. We are one male student, two female students, and three staff members. It

of a typewriter can be heard in the outer office. A telephone rings, and the sound of footsteps thump across the carpet, running to catch it. We sit facing each other, eyes lowered, in the spaces between words. It feels as if we have left the campus environs entirely, as if we have come to a placeless place. (Continued on page 4)

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BY GITA BROWN

is moon, and while, outside, students drift with the snow from building to building, we wait. The muffled sound of a typewriter can be heard in the outer office. A telephone rings, and the sound of footsteps thump across the carpet, running to catch it. We sit facing each other, eyes lowered, in the spaces between words. It feels as if we have left the campus environs entirely, as if we have come to a placeless place. (Continued on page 4)

The PSA@RIC Report

Professional Staff Association at Rhode Island College
600 Mt. Pleasant Avenue
Providence, RI 02908-1991

Because of ongoing negotiations, I am unable to bring you a full report on all the continuing issues. We notified the other side of our intention to enter into negotiations for a new contract nearly a year ago. Due to delays beyond our control, we began negotiating in October 2004. It is disappointing that we have gone nearly 21 months without any across-the-board pay increases, and we promise to continue to work hard to reach a fair settlement.

I am pleased to fill this space with a special report from former president Brian Allen, who is willing to share his experiences in negotiating the transition from life as a full-time employee at Rhode Island College to a very different life as a retiree. Watch for an announcement of a workshop to be led by Brian and Maggie Sullivan on retirement issues for PSA@RIC members.

Because of anticipated interest in this issue of the newsletter, we are pleased to add our faculty colleagues to the distribution list. Enjoy!

—Rob Bower

RETIREMENT

ISN'T FOR EVERYONE

BUT SOME WORK TOO LONG

\$ocial Security, despite what the President thinks, will be around for quite a while. Actuaries seem to have gotten the idea into people's heads that you should retire at a certain age. My official retirement age is sixty-five years and eight months. I bought into that, I guess, because when I was growing up it was expected that you work until you were sixty-five, then, hopefully, get a pension, a rocking chair, and wait. Anyway, after watching my wife retire about a year ago, I noticed some changes in her. We have been married for forty years, and we have grown to accept each other through thick and thin, but I started getting jealous of her new freedom. She wasn't bogged down and tired from work, she wasn't commuting and stressed from the day-to-day minutiae.

It was over Thanksgiving break that I decided to look at my financial situation, which included TIAA-CREF, Social Security, a few stocks, a small lot in Florida, plus my wife's retirement, and her Social Security. Then I evaluated what I would get by working two-and-a-half more years and putting more into TIAA-CREF. The answer was simple, I'd amass more money. Yeah, and how much? And how would that add to my happiness, enjoyment of life, or, as they say, my "quality of life"? All things being equal, working two-and-a-half more years seemed to be the way to go. But in my case, that didn't necessarily mean continued good health. I am sixty-two, soon to be sixty-three, and I have already lost two siblings and both my parents. Another sister was in a nursing home for nine years after a massive stroke and died in December of 2004. My children had never known a grandfather; both died before my children were born, and neither of them ever retired.

[2]

OF MOTION THAT GIVES WAY TO THE EXHALATION. ALL LIFE IS LIKE THIS. AS WE LEARN TO SETTLE INTO THE DIRECT REALIZATION OF THIS PERPETUAL ARISING AND FALLING AWAY, THIS PERPETUAL DYING AND BIRTHING, PERPETUAL BIRTHING AND DYING, WE SEE THE EQUALITY OF BIRTH AND DEATH.

CONTEMPLATIVE MEDITATION

TO LIVE FULLY IS TO LET GO AND DIE WITH EACH PASSING MOMENT, AND TO BE REBORN IN EACH NEW ONE.

MINDFULNESS IN PLAIN ENGLISH

GITA: If someone wanted to start meditating, what are some of the fundamentals?

TOM: Try to carve out the time to do it. Make the commitment to do it. And find, ideally, a quiet space where you can practice and go within. Most meditation teachers recommend sitting in an erect posture, not stiff. The alignment of your spine has some importance, if for no other reason than enabling you to develop some endurance for sitting quietly. You don't have to be sitting. You can meditate standing, chanting, lying down, walking. But sitting is the most common physical posture for meditation.

GITA: Susan Salzberg, cofounder of the Insight Meditation Center in Boston, says that "Ideally meditation is not something we do, but it is something we live."

TOM: It's a way of being in the world.

GITA: Seeing your life as a journey, where would you say you are going?

TOM: It kind of goes back to what I said before; I walk down the hall and see that gallery of faculty photos, many of whom have physically retired and/or are dead. So, I guess, that's where we're all going, isn't it? We're all headed into some unknown condition where the body/mind complex comes to an end.

Saint Bonaventure said we have three different realities, or three different eyes, if you will. The first eye is the world of real concrete objects, which we see with the eye of the flesh; the second eye is the world of ideas, such as algebra, which we understand with the eye of the mind; finally, there's the eye of the soul, which most of us haven't figured out how to open. Some of us are trying though. ●

[1]

GITA: What have been the benefits of meditation for you?

TOM: It has helped me live life more fully. I don't want to sleepwalk through my life, and there have been times when I've done that. I think we all do that. And that's what, perhaps, mindfulness is all about—being awake. Awake to life and to each and every moment of your life.

I T IS SAID THAT SOON AFTER HIS ENLIGHTENMENT, THE BUDDHA PASSED A MAN ON THE ROAD WHO WAS STRUCK BY THE EXTRAORDINARY RADIANCE AND PEACEFULNESS OF HIS PRESENCE.

THE MAN STOPPED AND ASKED, "MY FRIEND, WHAT ARE YOU? ARE YOU A CELESTIAL BEING OR A GOD?"

NO," SAID THE BUDDHA.

"WELL, THEN, ARE YOU SOME KIND OF MAGICIAN OR WIZARD?"

AGAIN THE BUDDHA ANSWERED, "NO."

"WELL, MY FRIEND, WHAT THEN ARE YOU?"

THE BUDDHA REPLIED, "I AM AWAKE."

I think one of the reasons most of us sleepwalk through life is because we have the illusion that we're going to live forever. I think as you get older you become more aware of your mortality. You realize that the body/mind complex is not going to be around forever. When my first wife died that was the worst moment of my life. But nothing puts life into perspective like death. It sort of wakes you up in a way that nothing else does. It actually helps you—being aware of death and mortality—to live. In Craig-Lee there are framed photos of faculty members displayed on the wall. They call it The Hall of Fame. All of those faculty members were alive and well at one time. I knew most of them. More than half of them are dead now. That makes you mindful of mortality.

ALL OF US SHARE IN COMMON THE INEVITABILITY OF OUR EVENTUAL DIMINISHMENT AND DEATH. THIS IS THE MYSTERIOUS THING ABOUT BIRTH. JUST TO BE BORN MEANS OUR DEATH IS ALREADY IN THE MAIL. EVEN AS I SPEAK, WE ARE MOVING, BREATH BY BREATH, TOWARD THIS DIMINISHMENT AND DEATH. IN THE VERY RELEASE OF THE EXHALATION—IN THE VERY LETTING GO—THE CYCLIC MYSTERY IS SET IN MOTION, WHICH IS INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM THE RECEIVING OF THE INHALATION. AND THE VERY ACT OF THE INHALATION IS IN THE FLOW

about retirement, and I would simply refer them to the Office of Human Resources, never to get the answers myself. I had retirees call me years later if things weren't working out for them, asking if the union could help them. The answer was always, "Retirement isn't a negotiated contract issue. We receive what other state employees receive." What I didn't know is that the Office of Human Resources, while very knowledgeable about health benefits, payout contractual issues, and Board of Governors retirement issues, do not advise employees.

Advice on such decisions is desirable, but in our litigious society, companies have backed off, fearing law suits if they are perceived to have misled an employee. TIAA-CREF, who I had great respect for, has been greatly impacted by the stock market decline in 2000, and it has become very difficult to get individual counseling, unlike in the past. I remember seeing the same TIAA rep four or five times, when I went to those three-hour information seminars or one-on-one meetings. I always felt that the advice they gave me was right on target. Then I noticed that there was always a different rep each time TIAA came on campus. I wasn't even able to get an appointment in a reasonable time frame. They have gone to telephone counseling and on-line retirement examples to service the participant. If you accept a preplanned, set package you will be pleased. If you want to deviate slightly, you could have a problem.

So what's a person to do? Looking around, there are many, many financial advisers and companies designed to help you with your retirement money. Like choosing a doctor, how do you really know? Is it safer to just stay where you are? After all, TIAA-CREF has 230 billion dollars to "play" with. That's comforting to know. If they do well, millions do well by them, and, of course, if they don't do well, millions are impacted.

This is where the crystal ball comes into play. Which way to go? Which "doctor" to pick? Is one "doctor" about the same as another? The big brokerage houses are pretty much the same. Some have strong quarters, followed by poor quarters. In my case, I have had a fifteen-year relationship with a relatively small, independent bank in South County that has helped me again and again as well as other family members. I found that they have a trust department, albeit only two billion dollars invested, and the character of their trust people is the same as their bank people. They have been a bank for over 200 years, which gives some indication they are not a fly-by-night organization. I decided to speak with them about what I would want from a retirement program, given the accumulations I have in TIAA-CREF. I have personally met with five employees in the trust department already. I am not a big bucks customer of their trust department. I rolled over all of my available accumulations from TIAA-CREF, but I am certainly made to feel as important as any of their customers, regardless of the size of the investment. I get to confer with them on the type of program designed just for my needs. Once you retire, all of your accumulation belongs to you, and Rhode Island College has no further role in what you do with it; the IRS does, but that's the

same regardless.

Another well-known financial advising company I went to was somewhere between TIAA-CREF and the bank trust department. The handling fee was a little higher than the other two, and they appeared to be salesmen for their own programs, programs such as long-term health care and estate planning. The handling fee of the trust department is known up front and probably a little higher than TIAA-CREF, who don't clearly show their cost.

The other major issue at retirement is health care for you and spouse or partner. I have a spouse, so I didn't ask questions about partners. Because I retired at age sixty-three, I was placed in COBRA for the next eighteen months. There is a small cost to me of \$74.73 per month and for my wife \$373.65 per month. I stay in whatever plan active workers are in. After eighteen months, my cost goes up to \$134 per month and my wife's goes up to \$669.98 per month, or I can find another Medi-Gap Plan. AARP and AFT offer plans that I will be looking at. This plan remains in effect until we are age sixty-five, which in my case will be six months. After age sixty-five, Medicare kicks in to cover your health benefits but not your dental, vision, or prescriptions. Congress has enacted legislation that will provide relief via a new prescription plan, due to the extremely high cost of prescriptions, especially for senior citizens, but it is complicated and may not be your best choice. Keep a close look at what is going on. You also have the option of continuing your life insurance plan at your cost. After age sixty-five, the basic coverage amount quickly reduces each year based on a fixed formula.

The Board of Governors continues to offer a severance package for eligible College faculty and professional staff. If you retire at the beginning of the fiscal year, you get 40 percent of your annual salary. For every month after that, you get 1/12th less. By retiring in December, I received 50 percent of 40 percent of my annual salary. By law, you can tax shelter the allowable percentage from your severance pay. Don't plan on spending that money for a few months after you retire, nor your payouts for vacation, sick, and special deferment pay. For your vacation time, you receive 100 percent of what you have on the books when you retire and for any compensatory time you have on the books. This IS NOT the case for sick time. There is

(Continued on back page)

AN INTERVIEW WITH TOM LAVIN

Tom Lavin, director of the Counseling Center, enters the room with a stack of books under his arm and closes the door. He slips into one of the upholstered chairs, placing the books on the coffee table. Students and staff meet here every Thursday afternoon for meditation. Tom established the group five years ago. He is slender and impeccably neat. His high forehead is underlined by low, raggy brows, overshadowing deep-set blue eyes. In outward appearance Tom could pass for an English professor. He has a distinguished, trim white beard. He wears spectacles, a v-necked sweater vest over shirt and tie, and corduroy pants. But he reverts from type, by coming clad in yellow construction boots, shoebox stiff and spotless. Tom has held many roles in his life; he's been a seminarian, an orderly in a mental ward, and a self-professed hippie. Despite the fact that he is a "thinker," he is also immensely human.

Tom looks up now and welcomes everyone, with a smile. He suggests we go around the room and introduce ourselves. Introductions include reasons why each participant has come. There are those who have come to renew their meditation practice after having left it for years, there are those who have come to relieve stress or anxiety, and others to deepen their spiritual life.

Tom reads a passage from one of the books on the coffee table, *Wherever You Go, There You Are*, by Kabat-Zinn. There is brief discussion. Finally we prepare to meditate for twenty minutes. I close my eyes, becoming mindful of my breathing. I focus, gently, on one breath at a time, mindful of how each inhalation gives way to each exhalation, giving way to each inhalation. Sitting still. Sitting straight. Deeply relaxed. I feel as if I've been away from my body and have now come home.

Once an old woman came to Buddha and asked him how to meditate. He told her to remain aware of every movement of her hands as she drew water from the well, knowing that if she did, she would soon find herself in that state of alert and spacious calm that is meditation.

Tibetan Book of Living and Dying

onion. Pain is like the central core of an onion, which we experience, at least from time to time, in our lives. Suffering is the additional layers we add on top of the pain. We can peel away the extra layers of suffering so that all we have to deal with is the pain.

GITA: And dealing with the pain directly makes it less painful?

TOM: There's been studies that show a person's pain perception is higher when they're anxious. The pain feels worse to them.

GITA: Anxiety, then, is an unnecessary layer we add to pain.

TOM: Yes, and a lot of pain treatment programs teach people to reduce their anxiety and thereby be able to better cope with the pain.

GITA: How did you come to meditation? I heard you say in our meditation group that you weren't a Buddhist.

TOM: No. I was raised a Roman Catholic long ago. I was even going to be a priest and was in the seminary for seven years. The liturgies in the seminary were wonderful and there was a real sense of community there, but I left the seminary with questions and doubts about organized religion. I didn't practice Roman Catholicism, or even think about it again, for the next thirty years. I grew my hair long and sort of dropped out.

GITA: Tom Lavin. Are you saying you were a hippie?

TOM: That was what was happening in those years, a kind of cultural revolution. In the words of Timothy Leary—the guy who advocated using LSD to expand your consciousness—tune in, turn on, drop out. I didn't get into the drug culture, but I was into questioning established ways of doing things.

GITA: Timothy Leary was also a former Harvard University clinical psychologist, not unlike yourself. I'm trying to imagine you in white duck trousers, Indian silk shirts, and bare feet.

TOM: I don't know if I've ever owned those kinds of clothes, but I'm still a hippie at heart, testing boundaries, breaking conventions. It's never been my goal to be always warm and fuzzy. My main goal is to be genuine

When I became director of the Counseling Center, I attended a workshop on meditation. It was something I was a little familiar with from the seminary, and I thought it might be something good to introduce here at RIC. I read Kabat-Zinn and then started practicing. I would also go to these directors' conferences and they'd always have morning meditation for those who were interested. I realized that if I wanted to share meditation with the students and staff, I needed to make a more serious commitment to really practicing it myself. I've been practicing meditation now for almost eight years.

One of the common misunderstandings about meditation is that it is a way to get to enlightenment, to get to relaxation, to get to peace of mind. That kind of thinking actually causes suffering. Suffering comes about when we try to avoid those things we define as bad, or unpleasant, or uncomfortable. Suffering also comes from trying to hold onto, or cling to, or chase after those things we define as good or pleasurable. And, finally, suffering comes from not seeing things the way they are, which they call being “deluded.” Delusion is obsessing on a future that hasn’t happened yet or on the past that’s already dead, rather than concentrating on the present moment. Mindfulness meditation is about developing the capacity, and maybe the discipline, to say, “Wait. Let me shift back to what is happening right now.”

GITA: Someone new to meditation might say it’s easy to see how trying to escape pain can create more pain, but they may not be able to see how clinging to something pleasurable creates suffering.

TOM: If we cling to pleasure we suffer because the nature of all things is not to last. Change is the nature of reality. It’s like a river. You can’t push the river and you can’t stop the river. When something’s pleasurable, you can’t stop it and make it last forever. However, that’s the illusion that people chase.

GITA: Okay, so, I’m meditating, neither clinging to nor rejecting anything. I’m focusing on the now—on my breathing. I’m just sitting here, focusing on my breathing. Sitting. Focusing. On my breathing.

TOM: Seems kind of silly doesn’t it.

GITA: Someone new to meditation might think so. They might say, I’m not really doing anything.

TOM: And one of the things you’re doing at that moment, when you say that, is you’re judging or questioning. When we talk about “being” as opposed to “doing,” we’re talking about existing without striving toward some goal. Kabat-Zinn talks about meditation as the practice of “non-doing,” it’s practicing being in the now without trying to get anywhere or do anything.

I T IS A TIME FOR LETTING GO OF ALL DOING, FOR SHIFTING INTO THE BEING MODE, IN WHICH YOU SIMPLY DWELL IN STILLNESS AND MINDFULNESS, ATTENDING TO THE MOMENT-TO-MOMENT UNFOLDING OF THE PRESENT, ADDING NOTHING, SUBTRACTING NOTHING, AFFIRMING THAT “THIS IS IT.”

WHEREVER YOU GO, THERE YOU ARE

Pain is inevitable but bearable in our lives. We’ve all had physical, emotional, or spiritual pain. We can’t escape it, but we can bear it. Suffering, on the other hand, is optional and transformable. I like to use the image of an

Mindfulness meditation is one of many relaxation and stress management practices taught at the Counseling Center. Tom has been at the Counseling Center for twenty-three years and director for ten. He completed his B.A. in psychology at St. Louis University and his Ph.D. in counseling psychology at the University of Missouri. The clinical staff of the Counseling Center also includes: Jan Park, Ed.D., psychologist; Denise DeSesa-Smith, Ph.D., counselor; Elisabeth Sundermeier, Ph.D., psychologist; Holly Schaff, B.S., intern; and Julie Lucier, M.A., intern. The following interview took place in Tom’s office.

GITA: Tom, has the number of students seeking counseling increased over the years?

TOM: The number of students we see in individual counseling has increased, but not as dramatically as the number of sessions for which we see them, in part because they are coming in with more serious problems. Most of the students we see are dealing with what we think of as relatively normal, situational problems, or the predictable developmental issues, that young adults go through, but there are also more students we see now with very serious issues. And maybe they’re just telling us more than they used to.

When a student comes in we first give them a checklist that describes the reasons they’ve come in. There’s a whole list of problems they can check off. Two of the items on the list are suicidal ideation and suicidal intentions. If someone’s thinking about that, we want to know about it as soon as possible. But not everyone is going to tell us the truth. Still, we’ve definitely seen an increase in the number of students who are at least willing to acknowledge suicidal ideation, and we’ve seen an increase in the number of students who engage in self-harming behavior—cutting themselves or other forms of self-harming. Certainly the need has now outgrown our resources.

ACCORDING TO SOME AUTHORITIES, UP TO 13 PERCENT OF PEOPLE IN THE UNITED STATES SUFFER FROM SOME KIND OF MENTAL DISORDER. WE ARE FRAGMENTED INTO SO MANY DIFFERENT ASPECTS, WE DON’T KNOW WHO WE REALLY ARE, OR WHAT ASPECTS OF OURSELVES WE SHOULD IDENTIFY WITH OR BELIEVE IN. SO MANY CONTRADICTIONARY VOICES, DICTATES, AND FEELINGS FIGHT FOR CONTROL OVER OUR INNER LIVES THAT WE FIND OURSELVES SCATTERED EVERYWHERE, IN ALL DIRECTIONS, LEAVING NOBODY AT HOME.

TIBETAN BOOK OF LIVING AND DYING

GITA: In your brochure you list a number of therapeutic practices you offer. Along with individual counseling, you conduct group workshops and trainings. Among them you list "open focus and imagery training, and cognitive restructuring and problem-solving methods." Let's start with "open focus." What is that?

TOM: Les Fehme, one of the pioneers in doing EEG brain wave biofeedback, coined the term "open focus." The idea is that we tend to think of ourselves as solid beings as opposed to things that are not solid. He takes you through a kind of guided meditation down to the molecular level. You visualize, or you think about, the fact that you are made up of these molecules that move and revolve and have spaces between them. Everything around us is basically molecular particles with spaces inbetween. And I think one of the effects it has psychologically when you think about that is that it weakens the boundaries between us and the rest of the universe. We realize that we're part of this larger dance, if you will, of molecules.

GITA: And cognitive restructuring?

TOM: Albert Ellis is one of the pioneers in cognitive therapy. A lot of the work we do as psychologists is to help people put things in perspective. This putting things in perspective is analogous to what an artist does. My office is right across from the Art Center. When the weather's warm, you see the art students out there drawing or painting. When an artist is going to draw, paint, or sketch something, usually what he or she does is look at the image and frame it with their hands. It's similar to taking a photograph. You try to frame the image with the lens of the camera and get in the things you want to get in and get out the things you want to keep out. Then the artist walks around and looks at the object from different angles. He's changing his perspective. Maybe he gets closer. Maybe he backs up. He's looking at the details of the object and he's looking at the object in relation to other things around it. This is how we gain perspective on our experiences.

GITA: Do you have a preference for any particular therapeutic approach?

TOM: It's important to try to understand a number of different methods, or perspectives, or schools of counseling and therapy and try to select what is going to be most useful for a given person with a given set of concerns at any given moment. That's why counseling is an art. It's not a science. You need to learn a lot, and you need to practice a lot, but you try not to fill your head with it and think about it when you're in the room with a client, because it's just going to get in the way. You're mainly trying to be present with the person in an honest, sensitive, and authentic way. But still we have to engage in an ongoing, lifelong process of learning and education. As licensed psychologists, we're mandated to do forty hours of continuing education every two years to maintain our license. We also hold a seminar once a week for interns or trainees, students who are learning to become psychologists and psychotherapists. In these seminars we talk about the literature and try to think about how it is connected to the actual flesh and blood people we're working with. We also have meetings with the staff where we talk about the work we're doing and try to get help from one another with things we're struggling with or we're confused about.

GITA: What kind of consultation do you offer faculty and staff?

TOM: Faculty and staff often come in contact with students in a way, and with a frequency, that we do not. So they may be the first to encounter a student who's in some sort of distress. We try to help them be aware of the signs. We teach them how to talk to the student and how to make a referral.

GITA: It's been said that the practice of meditation is the most effective form of therapy and self healing. What is mindfulness meditation?

TOM: Mindfulness meditation is based in a Buddhist tradition called vipassana meditation. It is a narrowing down and focusing on one thing at a time. The discipline of the practice is to try to be mindful of focusing on one thing, for example the breath. The nature of the mind is to wander. Our minds are restless, and when we try to focus on one thing, whether it be a word, or a phrase, or a sound, or our breathing, we tend to wander away. Thoughts and memories and physical sensations creep in and pull us away. When that happens, the idea is not to get upset with ourself, but to simply bring your mind back to your focus as soon as you realize you've strayed from it. Nothing else is necessary.

MIND IS LIKE A CANDLE FLAME: UNSTABLE, FLICKERING, CONSTANTLY CHANGING, FANNED BY THE VIOLENT WINDS OF OUR THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS. THE FLAME WILL ONLY BURN STEADILY WHEN WE CAN CALM THE AIR AROUND IT; SO WE CAN ONLY BEGIN TO GLIMPSE AND REST IN THE NATURE OF MIND WHEN WE HAVE STILLED THE TURBULENCE OF OUR THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS.

TIBETAN BOOK OF LIVING AND DYING

Practicing mindfulness meditation with some consistency and with commitment and discipline has benefits. Researchers, such as Herb Benson, who is a cardiologist up in Boston, have found that people change physiologically when they meditate. Their heart rate slows down, their respiration slows down, their metabolic rate slows down, their brain waves change, their blood chemistry changes in ways that suggest a lower level of anxiety. For example, when you meditate, you have less lactate in your blood, which we produce more of when we are anxious.