**Mindfulness Meditation Group – 9 Feb 2017**

**Leader: Laura Doliner**

**Being Mortal by Atul Gawande**

7:00-7:15 Early arrival; set-up

7:15 -7:30 Ongoing arrivals; preparations to sit

**7:30** **Begin promptly**

**7:30-7:40** *Plan for the evening*

* Last month I read a remarkable book, called “Being Mortal,” by Atul Gawande. It raised a question in my mind that I thought would be a worthwhile subject for a guided mediation.
* We’ll start with a 20 minute sit, followed by 10 minutes of walking meditation. Then I will present some of the ideas in the book, followed by a 10 minute guided meditation. We’ll have a few minutes to share our reflections, and close with a last 5 minute sit.

*Introduction to sitting and walking meditation*

* We are creating for each other a community of practice: there are no levels, no beginners, no advanced.
* The essence of sitting meditation is to find a physical posture that supports you and allows for stillness, then focus your attention. The most common object of focus is the breath. Each time you find yourself distracted by a thought or a sensation, gently return your attention to your natural breath.
* If you have a practice related to the breath, you are most welcome to use it.

**7:40-8:00** **20-minute sit**

**8:05-8:10** *Introduction to walking meditation*

* *Read walking meditation instructions*

**8:10-8:20 10 minute walking meditation**

**8:20-8:30 Book: *Being Mortal* by Atul Gawande**

**8:30-8:40** **10 minute Guided meditation**

* + What makes life worth living to you? Your answer is as unique as you are, and will change with time and circumstances.
  + What is your answer today?

**8:40-8:50** **Reflections from participants**

**8:50-8:55** **5-minute sit**

**8:55-9:00** **Closing**

* Invitation to donate
* Guf Va'Nefesh - Body-Mind-Spirit Integration Workshop by Tana Saler
  + Monday Feb 13, 2017 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM
  + Details on the ORH website; carpool – contact me before Sat Feb 11
* Next meditation group Thurs March 9, same time, same place

**9:00-9:15** **Clean-up and depart**

***Being Mortal* by Atul Gawande**

* A few weeks ago, an older friend handed me this book saying, “You must read this.” I was surprised by her urgency.
* *Being Mortal* by surgeon Atul Gawande lays out the conventional medical approach to loss of independence and end of life decisions, the shortcomings of this approach, and his vision of better ways.
* I’ve lived through some of this with my parents and sister, may they rest in peace. I worry about how I will fare when it is my turn.
* As one reviewer says, the book is “not just about dying and the limits of medicine but about living to the last with autonomy, dignity and joy.” (Katherine Boo, quoted on <http://atulgawande.com/book/being-mortal/> )
* Stories Dr Gawande tells:
  + His evolution as a doctor – encounters with terminally ill patients
    - We’ve been wrong about what our job is in medicine. We think our job is to ensure health and survival. But really is larger than that. It is to enable well-being. And well-being is about the reasons one wishes to be alive. Those reasons matter not just at the end of life, or when debility comes, but all along the way. (p259)
    - A palliative care specialist describes her experience with discussing end of decisions with her own father. He surprises her by saying, “As long as I can eat chocolate ice cream and watch football on TV, life is worth living. So, she bases her decision on this when faced with the question of resuscitation when her father’s heart stopped on the operating table
  + The history of assisted living and long-term care institutions, with wonderful examples of unconventional facilities
    - Lacking a coherent view of how people might live successfully all the way to the very end, we have allowed our fates to be controlled by medicine, technology, and strangers. <http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/medical_examiner/2014/10/end_of_life_medical_decisions_atul_gawande_book_excerpt_on_no_risky_chances.htm>
    - We have the opportunity to refashion our institutions, culture, and conversations to transform the possibilities for the last chapters of all of our lives. <http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/medical_examiner/2014/10/end_of_life_medical_decisions_atul_gawande_book_excerpt_on_no_risky_chances.htm>
  + His father’s struggle with cancer, coming to terms with increasing limitations
    - In the end, a person doesn’t view his life as merely the average of its moments—which, after all, is mostly nothing much, plus some sleep. Life is meaningful because it is a story, and a story’s arc is determined by the moments when something happens… We have room to act and shape our stories— although as we get older, we do so within narrower and narrower confines. <http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/medical_examiner/2014/10/end_of_life_medical_decisions_atul_gawande_book_excerpt_on_no_risky_chances.htm>
    - All we ask is to be allowed to remain the writers of our own stories. That story is ever changing. Over the course of our lives, we may encounter unimaginable difficulties. Our concerns and desires may shift. But whatever happens, we want to retain the freedom to shape our lives in ways consistent with our characters and loyalties. (p40-1)
* The question:
  + What makes life worth living to you? Your answer is as unique as you are, and will change with time and circumstances.
  + What is your answer today?

WALKING MEDITATION

Adapted from *Jewish Meditation Practices for Everyday Life* by Rabbi Jeff Roth (pp192-3)

These instructions are designed to lead you to notice the changing sensations as each foot lifts off the ground, moves, and is placed back down.

Shifting weight while standing

Start by standing up and bringing your awareness to the bottom of your feet.

Close your eyes and take a moment to see what it is like to let your attention rest in the sensations in the bottom of your feet while you are standing still.

Now, pick one of your feet, and rest the attention on the sensations in the bottom of that foot. Slowly, shift your weight so that most, but not all, of your weight is on that foot. As you shift your weight, notice the changing sensations in the foot that is receiving the extra weight.

As you finish shifting weight to that foot, allow your attention to shift to the foot now carrying less weight.

Begin to shift your weight back so that more weight is on the other foot. Notice the sensation in the bottom of the other foot as you begin to return weight to it.

Continue this back and forth to get the experience of tracking changing sensations in each foot as you shift your weight.

Walking

Open your eyes.

Pick one foot, slowly lift it and begin moving it forward. Try tracking the changing sensations as the foot becomes free of any weight, lifts, moves forward, and is placed down. When it is fully down, shift your attention to the back foot and begin to notice the sensations as the heel and then the rest of that foot lifts and moves forward till it becomes planted. Do this for about ten steps, and then turn around and do another ten steps.

Laura Doliner

31 Jan 2017