

Living Mindfully with an Aging Body Steve Flowers

Steve Flowers: So let's start like we've started each one – by doing absolutely nothing and being still for a little while, which you probably already discovered is rather difficult to do.

[He begins leading the audience in a guided meditation]

Just sit and maybe allow your eyes to gently close. Shift your attention from the external world, with words, ideas, and activities to just the simple feelings – the sensations of your breath coming and going...somewhere in your body like the nostrils or mouth or belly. And while you're breathing in, knowing you're breathing in. While you're breathing out, feeling the breath going out...[silence]. And in a way this is welcoming yourself here. Actually showing up. Coming out of future, out of the past, out of the world ever-changing thoughts to just be here. Your ears are open, your mind is open, your heart is open... [silence] And you may also extend a little gratitude to yourself for your appreciation. Thank you for coming, thanking yourself for coming, for giving yourself your gift.

[End of meditation]

I'm starting with this poem from Jane Kenyon, called "Otherwise.":

*I got out of bed on two strong legs.
It might have been otherwise. I ate
cereal, sweet
milk, ripe, flawless
peach. It might
have been otherwise.
I took the dog uphill
to the birch wood.
All morning I did the work I love.*

*At noon I lay down
with my mate. It might
have been otherwise.
We ate dinner together
at a table with silver
candlesticks. It might
have been otherwise.
I slept in a bed
in a room with paintings
on the walls, and
planned another day
just like this day.
But one day, I know,
It will be otherwise.*

[He picks up two bells] You can always come to the end of these practices [inaudible] the idea of peace. May the world be at peace, and may all beings be at peace. [Rings bells twice]

So welcome back, you guys are interested. Let me check – how many people have come to each one of these? Holy smokes! You guys must like me. [laughter] Who was that actor at the

Oscars who won the Oscar and was going, “They like me, they like me”? Sally Fields, remember? Well, thank you for coming. How many people are coming for the first time? Welcome.

Maybe as we start since, since there are a number of you that have come here before, you’ve gotten something out here. Let me check in with you. What have you gotten? What are the things that have been most important to you and that you are appreciating the most so far? I’d like you to just check in with yourself for a few minutes. [Inaudible from audience] Remembering to breathe. What else? [Inaudible from audience] So when we remember to breathe that’s about – just by returning to the breath. I was talking about this with another person earlier -- and feeling the breath coming and going, and no longer caught up with what? The ruminations of this thinking mind that never wants to shut up, right? If I’m just learning to be with the sensations of the breath I can have a bit of reprieve from the constant internal dialogue and find a place to rest. I can actually find an exit out of it sometimes; just take up residence in the belly or the nostrils. Just practice with breathing.

What else? What are some of the other important things you’ve taken away?

Audience member: I can tell myself that I don’t have to fix the situation.’

Steve Flowers: Did you all hear that? I tell myself that I don’t have to fix the situation. Isn’t that a relief? Most of the times there’s -- particularly when we’re working with several things that were talking about like today – an aging body, and there’s no fixing that. It’s aging. But, you know, how we age is a big deal. Sometimes it’s not fixing the aging, it’s fixing the way we’re looking at aging—adjusting our way of looking at aging, adjusting our way of looking at our life situation. Noticing the judgments and the resistance, noticing the “self talk” that might add to suffering. What else have you been learning that’s important to you?

Audience member: Instead of being caught up in the anxiety, acknowledging it and just letting it go.

Steve Flowers: Instead of being caught up in the anxiety, acknowledging it and just letting it go. Anxiety, an interesting condition. It’s created by a certain kind of thinking, anticipatory thinking that’s about the future. That’s about the future, but there’s a little twist – thoughts about the future and imagining the worst. We can – if we were to write a book about anxiety to relate to over at Barnes & Noble, it would just start the title with “What if?” Because that’s at the beginning of many of those anxiety [inaudible] thoughts, right? “I’m doing it again, I’m up there again. Come on back, honey. What are you doing up there? Do you really know what’s going to happen? Do you?” “No, but I think it’s going to be bad!”

What else?

Audience member: I like coming to a place where I feel like I’m in a community of acceptance, because all around me I see people trying to run from aging. And it isn’t working. I like just sitting here being with the acceptance of it.

Steve Flowers: Thank you so much. It’s so true. We get together in a place like this and we join – we find our common humanity. And we find that we’re part of – well, all of us are aging. Some of us just want nothing to do with it. My mother wanted nothing to do with it. She, at 63, spent an hour or two every morning in the mirror, putting on makeup. There were wigs, there were things that squished things in and squished things out. [laughter] She was a spectacle to behold. She

could barely walk as she got into the room because of all of the corsets and everything. She worked at it. She did not want to grow old. And it's nice to be with a community where we are. Although I feel summarily unqualified to talk about age since in the last 20 minutes I've met one person who's 98, and they look brighter than a Christmas tree. What's that about? How do we get to be there? Not by pretending that we're still spring chickens, but maybe by never forgetting that we can live fully no matter how old we are. [Inaudible] We follow our hearts and keep the dreams in front of us. That it's never too late to be the person you've always wanted to be.

What were you going to say?

Audience member: [Inaudible] ...when you talk so much about how to train the brain to be more compassionate, to actually bring children to compassion.

Steve Flowers: Particularly the work of Richard Davidson at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He's been engaged for some years in teaching compassion. So that is being brought now to mindful schools in Canada and all over the United States, in kindergarten and first grade. Teaching children how to be compassionate. And, you know, they did one experiment with a bunch of college students where they gave them all \$30, which, you know, for college students is a pretty good hunk of change – that's 20 beers or something. [laughter] A pizza! So that – and they did this experiment where they were with a cohort.

And there's always a ruse in these kinds of experiments. They said they were interacting with another person with this experimenter; there was a watcher, who left the room as they started an expert that interaction. And they were just on a computer doing this. It was related to a computer program. But in the computer program the person they were relating to, the fake person, was really talking about some difficulties in their life and things are going through. They gave this this college student the option at the end of this dialogue to either go away with this \$30 or keep it – or give it to that person or a portion of it. And what they found was that – with the measurements and testing later – that the ones that somehow felt the compassion for this person and gave the \$30, or a large portion of it, were much happier than the person that kept it.

Even by the brain imagery in the areas of the brain that show happiness – quite a bit of research on that showed that -- that five dollars could buy you happiness. And in this research student they showed that, with these MRIs and CAT scans...yes, that five dollars can buy you happiness if you give it away. [Inaudible] is a similar kind of experience to somebody who really needed it. You can train in compassion, and it's kind of contagious. You can get it from those who have it. If somebody is chosen to show a keep compassion for you where you're going through, you'll find it easier to show the same or another person.

But what are other important things that you've learned?

Audience member: [inaudible] ...living in the present.

Steve Flowers: Living in the present. Oh, boy, isn't that an important one? Isn't that hard to do? The mind hardly ever wants to be here.

Audience member: [inaudible]

Steve Flowers: Yes. Work to keep up with new technology. It doesn't stop. I mean, if you want anything done, ask a 10-year-old. And of all the things you've heard and learned – you're back again and again, so you must be getting something – what would you like me? We've got our

last meeting working on the aging body. What would you most like to do with this meeting? What do you want? What do you want to learn? What are you looking for?

Audience member:[inaudible] ...moving beyond that towards ourselves, when we find ourselves going through maybe some physical ailment or problems – I think health care is on the verge of changing drastically and I think we're going to have to be taking more responsibility for ourselves. So how can you facilitate within ourselves and within our communities more self-healing?

Steve Flowers: So some better self talk: How can I take better care of myself? I think may that, even though technology and medicine has gone a long ways, it has probably always been the same – that we can do more for ourselves than anybody else can. Particularly when it comes to an aging body, health, we really can do more for ourselves than anyone else can. How then, can we do this? That's a great question, and I will look at that today. Yes, sir?

Audience member: I'm thinking about the power of limits. [inaudible] ...I seem to have encountered more limits. The sense of the limits becomes stronger and stronger. I can't run as fast. Actually, it's mostly physical things that I can't do like I did yesterday or last year. And referring to them as "limits" and just dealing with them ...it seems to me there must be a creative way and something useful [inaudible].

Steve Flowers: You see how he's recognizing his limits, yes? But there's something beneficial when you recognize them and own them. Embrace them, maybe. You're no longer fighting against them. Thank you. What else? What do you want? Yes, ma'am.

Audience member: I'm reading [inaudible]. I'm on my fifth reading of it. And I want to sit with a group of people to get feedback on work I'm doing. I'm working on changing my attitude about chronic pain. And I work out at a gym. So when I'm at the gym and I'm sitting on a bike I'm reading [inaudible]. So I put the two together and really shift attitudes about chronic pain.

Steve Flowers: So let's touch into that. I think chronic pain and other chronic conditions are pretty common for all of us aging. Maybe a few of us – the very, very healthy and the very, very lucky – don't have something that's chronic. So absolutely. Look at coming into a different relationship with pain is huge, because for many people – I'm working with a number of people in my primary work as a counselor with a lot of pain referrals and the people that are quite young who've got this pain, they hate this pain. And they're fighting it for all they're worth. Recognize limitations? Forget it! I refuse to accept this limitation. And, guess what? The more they fight it, the worse it gets.

There's no fighting this battle. There's no – it ends up becoming the center of your life rather than something peripheral in your life. And what we're wanting to do is to open – that is, turning towards – it frees me that which I turn towards, turn into, transforms me. Each condition I flee from pursues me. And another piece – in the Gospel of Thomas, I think, Jesus said, "If you bring forth what's within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, it will destroy you." Interesting thing. That talks to the power of acceptance of what is, in both these cases. Radical acceptance. Whether you like it or don't like it. Other pieces that you want to do today?

Audience member: [inaudible]...I am working very, very hard on not accepting society's "must" [inaudible]...I can say, "I don't have to do that. I really don't and this is why."

Steve Flowers: When I was in college, in the counseling center in 1972 -- on the wall of the counseling center there was a big poster. And it said, "I've got to stop this compulsive masturbation." You don't see that in counseling centers anymore -- something about the 70s. What else [inaudible]?

Audience member: Living in the here and now -- it's the present, it's a present.

Steve Flowers: These are very helpful things you guys and it gives me an idea on the way to go. Let's think for a few minutes here -- where we're at. What's most important to me as a person, each one of you as an individual. This is it, really, this is our life. We're living it right now. In many ways we really don't know what's going to happen next, right? We really don't know where we're going, we don't know what's going to happen next, there's all sort of new thing coming. It's always changing. And it's a big deal just to show up for it. And to not block and not escape it -- and get me out of some of the ruminations that keep me out of the here and now, which is a big deal in its own right. The mind never wants to shut up. There's a comment about everything, like Constant Comment tea. It goes and it goes and it goes.

To actually take moments -- somebody once told me the most valuable things that's they've gotten so far out of here is actually to take time to do absolutely nothing. 15 minutes, 20 minutes, just sitting there doing nothing. You're not planning things, you're not going over things. You're not criticizing, just being.

Audience: [inaudible]...view is wasting time

Steve Flowers: Wasting time. I think that there's a part of all of our minds that have been trained about that from the beginning. We've got to somehow get to the toilet on time, and everybody's happy about that. Then we can't put our elbows on the table. And we've got to get good grades. And we've got to get to work on time. And we've got to get a better job. And it's all about striving. And we try to cultivate this mind that's always trying to get somewhere. And usually the closer you get [inaudible] in a metropolis, the faster we want to get that way. You know, you get into San Francisco and people for some reason are all going 80 miles an hour? And they're about six inches away from one another and you're not going fast enough. And I have that in me, too. What's interesting, though, is when I finally manage to get the [inaudible] -- some people call it the "do-do personality" -- out of the way, something else emerges that is a part of me that I didn't even know, that actually has a lot of happiness. We can even take that person that's trying to accomplish things on vacation with us. Or if you're unfortunate enough to be married to somebody like this—you just wanted to hang out on the beach and they wanted to do the zip lines, and they wanted to do this, and they wanted to see the hula dancers. They're [inaudible], right? They're happy hanging out for one picture at the Louvre. But they've got the whole city to see in two hours. The doing, doing, doing. It's hard to stop. Yes, sir.

Audience member: I also had a question [inaudible]. I think being on time is sort of the machine of our society. You're not on time [inaudible]. And where does this huge values we give to being on time come from? And the need for therapeutic principles [inaudible] you leave at home for a while. I think I've underestimated it a lot. It's the machine of society.

Steve Flowers: I read once that first we make our habits and then our habits make us. Watch your thoughts because they turn into emotions, your emotions because they become your moods, and your moods because they harden into your character. Your character hardens into your body, so by the time a man is in his fifties he has the body he deserves.

Here's the deal. In our very first piece I've been trying to get across – I'll illustrate this with a story. [Inaudible]...Suzuki, a Zen teacher, who was one of the first to come into this country. The story was told that a professor has gone to see the Zen master. And the professor has been studying Eastern religions all his life and he knows a lot about Zen because he's been studying it alot. He sits down with this Zen master and he is very happy to be having this audience, and he's wanting to learn all he can about Zen from the Zen Master. The master asks him if he would like have some tea. And the professor says "Yes." The master starts pouring the tea in the cup and the cup fills up and starts pouring onto the table and on the floor. And the professor says, "The cup is over full. Nothing more will go in." The old man smiled and he put the tea pot down and he said, "Yes. Just like your mind. You already know everything. There's nothing more I can teach you." And that was the end of the interview.

And so how many of us have these cups that are overfull. We're already filled with all these concepts. We know. Yes. So part of it this is to make ourselves able to receive we need to look through some of these things that we've been hanging onto. In our second class I talked about clinging and what we cling to. And we did an exercise on clinging and the consequences of clinging. So maybe, taking just a few minutes – What are you still clinging to? So let's hang out with that one for a few minutes. What are you still clinging to? What is it that you don't want to let go of? I talked about this with another group I was working with.

When we first came to the Chico I had just got out of the Air Force, just gotten out of the Vietnam War. And my wife made a dear friend. And they heard about tubing down the Sacramento River. So she and her friend Marta went tubing down the Sacramental River. And they were just about to the washout when Marta's tube crashed up against the branches that were there. And she was panicked, and she grabbed a hold of a branch and she held the branch as it pulled her underwater. And she never let go of the branch. She drowned holding the branch. And they had a diver come to pry her fingers from the branch they could bring her body to shore. This is the stuff of fear, right? My wife is on the shore, helpless, couldn't get out to her, didn't know what to do, screaming, "Let go! Let go!" So this has been one of my most poignant experiences about clinging and how deadline it can be. If only she had let go, there was a beach about 20 feet away, 25 feet away. But she was too afraid.

So much of the things we cling to have to do with fear. Of wanting or craving. Right? Egoic [inaudible]. What are you still clinging to, what's in the cup? What do you no longer need to have in the cup? Consider what you might leave behind.

I showed that picture of the dog, remember? And that a lady in the park The woman had her pooper scooper and she was doing her duty to get it in the doggie bag. The dog had a window, a little balloon, and it said, "Just sniff it and go on. Why keep it?" [laughter] I think it's a really high teaching.

People come into my office with these backpacks – oh, my God. They've had stuff in there since they were five years old. What is this? Why are you keeping this? "To suffer" comes from ancient words that mean "to carry." What am I carrying? My friend Mona was just there, going to college – this was about 1973, '74. And she had to leave Texas and her home, which wasn't good. So she packed up all of her most important stuff and put it in this backpack. And she headed off to California, all on her own. She's about 18 and she has all her precious stuff. And, you know, it's all back there. But she wasn't getting rides. And so about every couple of miles as she's going along, she takes off the backpack and goes through it at a special place, at a site she knew she could get to in a day. And this went on all the way through New Mexico. So at one point she said, somewhere halfway across New Mexico she took off the whole backpack and

buried it. [laughter] With all this stuff, and she left it behind. And I asked her, “Did you ever go back and get any of that valuable, previous stuff?” She said, “Are you crazy? That’s a long ways to go!”

What is this that we’re carrying? When my mother-in-law died, she had this whole garage full of magazines that were bound perfectly by year, because she knew the time was going to come when she was going to re-read those magazines. [laughter] What are we hanging onto? What are you hanging onto? What do you need to let go of? If the cup is full of all this other stuff, including your personality, sense of self, personal history – there’s hardly anything, there’s hardly any room left for something new. Why do those beautiful little kids have such bright eyes? They’re so excited about things. They ain’t to nothin’ they’re hanging onto. This is all brand new – it’s like, wow, look at that! And you have the sense of mystery and wonder showing up there.

This is the value of creating space, appreciating space. And even you find it at alters all over the world they have vessels and bases that represent the sacredness of empty space. A vase can take a flower, a room can hold people, a cup that is empty may be filled. But we hardly give ourselves any empty space, right? So just to do this one work, to make some empty space for yourself. We imagine that we have to fill it up with something good, as if there isn’t something good already happening in this world. That we have to invent a good. But that’s not really true. Nature is still going on. Love comes from somewhere. Compassion comes from somewhere. Life itself and truth. We might just need to open to what is, rather than always trying to fill something with energy. That’s when we notice things that are pretty special.

So in thinking about this, I would like you to consider, then, what is it that you care about the most? We’re going to take a little time with this one. And maybe even pause, and set things down, and close your eyes again and just sit with it for a few minutes. What do I care about the most? Really. What do I care about the most? And you might even do this from the point of view of reaching, and opening, and feeling into your heart. In terms of right now, what do you care about the most. See if you can do this with a kind of non-intellectual – but just an opening – an awareness practice of listening to the heart turning toward [inaudible].

Maybe to take us a little further into this contemplation, I’ll share with you an event that happened last December. And often I am called to the medical center to focus on a problem. There was a patient and his wife. A man who was 55 dealing with a terrible headache who just retired a year ago. Not even a year – six months ago. He had a headache and they found a brain tumor. They told him, “We can get the tumor out but you only have a couple of months to live.” And he and his wife are freaking out and the doctor who called me said, “Steve, can you please come? They are in acute crisis and they are in such extreme anguish and distress.” And I told him that I couldn’t because I had another responsibility but I could go in the morning. And I did.

And she came, too; the wife joined us. And I sat with them. I asked, “Well, what’s happening?” And she told me the story about the headache and the tumor. His head looks like a train track; they really opened up his skull and they’ve taken out this tumor. And he’s laying in the bed. And after she’s done telling everything about it – and that how they’ve got to get out of there, they’ve got to find a decent hospital with doctors who know what they’re doing, where they can get this thing treated, that they’re out of their minds...

I turn to him and I ask, “Well, how are you doing?” He said, “Well,” and he reached over, this big old burly blue collar worker, takes a hold of my hand, and says, “I’ve been laying here all night

long thinking about that. And I've been thinking that I didn't love my life very well and I didn't love my children very well." And he started to cry. Then his wife immediately jumped in to say, "How can you say that? You've been the best dad, the best – "

I stopped her and said, "Wait a minute. Can you imagine if you had been the one laying here all night with that prognosis, can you imagine asking yourself, 'Did I live well? Did I love well?' And if you asked yourself these questions, how would you feel?" And she said, "Oh my God, I'm so controlling. I just want everything to be right." And she turns to him and says, "Is that what you're doing?" And he started to cry again and he turned to me and said, "Thank you so much. Yes, it's what I've been doing." And then I asked him, "What is it you want to do now?" He said, still holding my hand, "I've been thinking, I've been thinking, I have just a couple of months to do what I always should have done. I want to be with my wife and kids, and I want to show them how much I love them."

And I watched her face and I watched her eyes, and I knew that meant, and she knew that meant they aren't going anywhere. They aren't going off chasing the best cancer centers in the world. He knows what he wants to do. So he got to touch it that night: what is my highest value? What's most important to me? What I care about the most.

So thinking about yourself, too – looking back, what has mattered to you the most? Looking back, what has mattered to you the most? You answer that. And open – just see what emerges. What has mattered the most?

And perhaps looking forward – what do you want to do? As Mary Oliver says in one of her poems, "with your one wild, precious life," what do you really want to do, no matter how much or how little time you really have. What do you want to do?

So as soon as you get a feeling for a few of these things, turn to the person next to you, shift to a place of talking for a few moments. And introduce yourself if you don't already know each other. One person talks the other lessons, Tell them what came up for you as you were reflecting on this question. Then switch rolls. I'll ring the bell in a few minutes.

Isn't it great to just talk with one another about things that are real? Isn't it great just to speak some of your truth to a complete stranger and find out you have some resonance? Like that person said – how wonderful it is to be in a community that really wants to be who they are, where they are.

So, what did you guys discover? What did you find in that contemplation? Yes?

Audience member: I don't even know how to say this, but [inaudible] family. But I know now that I'm not the only person who thinks that way. [inaudible]

Steve Flowers: There's an old saying. If I'm not from others, who am I? If I'm not for myself, who will be? And so it says in the Bible that you love your neighbor AS yourself. Well, if that was the case, most of our neighbors would hate us. [laughter] Because we're not very nice to ourselves. Yes, ma'am.

Audience member: I just decided to raise my hand. I wasn't going to, but went you said that, it set me off. Because it's taken me [inaudible] years to learn that I am the most important in my life. If I don't take care of myself, I could not help anyone else.

Steve Flowers: Beautiful.

Audience member: I've helped other people all my life and they get the benefit. And then I have to go to bed for a week because I'm totally exhausted and spiritually defunct. [inaudible]

Steve Flowers: Beautiful. As I said, that heart, compassion – fills itself with blood, infuses itself with blood – before it sends blood to anywhere else in the body. It has one rest every four beats. It's always infusing itself. Guess what happens to the rest of the body when the heart stops – well, yes, we know. [laughter]

Audience member: Just how important “now” is.

Steve Flowers: Yes.

Audience member: Your story reminded me of the importance of self-forgiveness.

Steve Flowers: Yes, self-forgiveness is huge. Thank you.

Audience member: People and relationships are more important than things.

Steve Flowers: Yes. One of things I'll do at my mindful stress reduction class – the third week, we'll have this pleasant events calendar. Every day you're supposed to show up and notice if you've had a pleasant event. And people – and a lot of people in the class are absolutely astounded that they even have pleasant events. Because they're feeling misery about a bad body and an unsound mind, but they're having pleasant events. Most of those events were happening with other people. Then the second week you have an unpleasant events calendar, and guess what? Most of the unpleasant events involve other people. [laughter]

What else did you notice? What has the greatest value? What's been the most important to you as you look back over your life? What has touched you? Yes?

Audience member: [inaudible]

Steve Flowers: The same. What is it?

Audience member: To give of my heart, because I know what a good heart I have. And to find the correct way in order to do it.

Steve Flowers: Did you guys hear that? To give of my heart and the correct way to do it. That's huge. That's a lifetime. There's the value of aging there. Yes, sir?

Audience member: That's very close to what I was thinking. Something about the magic word “healing.” I want to do that in a way that's appropriate – the right way that works for that person, other people, my family and friends. It's [inaudible]. It's something we do as a species. It's something we do as homo sapiens. [inaudible]

Steve Flowers: That's one of those places you really have to listen to your heart. And you wonder, what is healing for this person? It also is true that the body knows how to heal itself. We don't have to figure out how to mend those cells back together after they're cut. [inaudible] Sometimes we just need to get out of the way. There are some things we can do to facilitate

that. Yes, that's a good – I think love guides us in that. Being open to listen. Sometimes we can cause an awful lot of trouble trying to help somebody.

Audience member: Most of the time I flub it. [laughter]

Steve Flowers: Well, you know...what else? Did somebody else have their hand raised? You wanted to say something of great value? Yes?

Audience member: I couldn't really think of anything I'd like to do I don't do already. But my partner pointed out to me that – she used the word "gratitude" and didn't realize that I'm just not grateful enough. Maybe that's it.

Steve Flowers: You should be critical of yourself for that. [laughter]

Audience member: It felt so good – why do I want to do this for?

Steve Flowers: Yes. Thank you. That's beautiful, really. Good stuff, huh? These things affect – these things – A great quote from Jack Kornfeld (sp?) in one of these last video slides I have; "The things that matter most in life aren't grand, fantastic. They're the moments when we touch one another." When I look back over my life, I don't have these fantastic events that stand out as my "great moments." But these very simple moments – a smile; oh my God, she likes me; an acknowledgement; a teacher that thought I was smart. Somebody that believed in me, somebody that stood by me after I messed up. Those are the things – those were the things that really matter. And they are human relationships. They are having to do with love. They are having to do with forgiveness, they do have to do with compassion, kindness. It kind of makes you wonder. All these other things that can be touted as such great, important values – fantastic cars and the like. They really don't hold much draw, do they.

I have a piece – many years ago when I did my first meditation retreat about 14 years ago – I've been going to about 7 or 8 a year ever since. But this first one I decided to take off the Maui of all places, probably because I wanted to go to Maui. I thought it would be cool. It was at a retreat center, this very, very remote retreat center up in a jungle in the mountains. Very exquisite, very exotic, very remote, very private. There we did this five-day mindfulness retreat. And one woman, about 74, came there with her daughter. And she told us at the beginning of this retreat that this was the first wonderful thing she'd ever given to herself in her whole life. She said, "I've always been underneath the thumb of a man. First I was underneath my dad's thumb, and then he handed me over to my husband. And I've been under his thumb my whole life. This is the first time I've been free. He died last year and I'm finally giving myself something I've always wanted to do. And I've come to a meditation retreat, of all things, on Maui. And I'm here to find myself." It was a wonderful retreat and a lot of good things happened.

But on the last day – I go off walking in this jungle. Oh my God, it was exquisite with the mist and the spider webs and the fronds and the flowers. Just an amazing place. As I was walking through [inaudible], all of a sudden I saw her. And she was in a meadow and she was nude and she was dancing. And it was a beautiful dance and she was beautiful. And I hid behind a tree and watched her dance, naked. [laughter] I wasn't feeling like a peeping tom or something, but she was so beautiful in her movements and her dance. It was so sweet. I watched her a couple of minutes and then I slipped away. And she never knew I saw her. But that afternoon we were doing our last check-in. She shared a piece of a poem. She shared from [inaudible]: "The song I have come to sing remains unsung to this day. I've spent my life stringing and unstringing my

instrument.' Well, today I want to tell you all I found my song and I sang it. And I found my dance and I'll never forget it." And I knew what she was talking about. [laughter]

And oh, about three years ago, I went to another meditation retreat. At the end of the retreat a woman comes to me and she says, "Remember me? I want to that retreat on Maui with my mom, who died last year." I said, "Really? Well, something happened there I thought you would be interested in." And I told her the story. And she said, "Oh my God, I knew it. She was never the same woman after that experience. She did find her song, she did find her dance, she did have a chance to become herself. And I really got a chance to be with her. For the first time in our lives, "the song I have come to sing remains unsung to this day. I've spent my life stringing and unstringing my instrument"

So, a few more things. We're going to take a break in a few minutes, just so people can jump up and use the bathroom. Let's consider, then, the value of planning what we do want. Of watering the seeds of happiness rather than struggling with the seeds of suffering. We want to water the seeds of happiness. We don't want to water the seeds of suffering. We want to water the seeds of happiness, right? What are we doing with our minds, our attention? What are we consuming on the TV and in the newspapers and the internet? What are we doing with our minds? This is our diet. What are we focusing on? Whatever we focus on grows. What do you want to grow. It's really a very intentional thing, to start looking towards what you want to grow – to be nourishing happiness or peace or love or kindness or forgiveness or compassion. Whatever is a high value to you. They don't grow by themselves. They do need to be planted, they do need to be encouraged, they do need to be tended, they do need water, they do need your time. It's never – consider it's never too late to be the person you've always to be. No matter how old you are, it's never too late to begin, to allow to emerge.

Another story. A few years ago, a wonderful gentleman I met – two doctors called me and wanted me to see him. And two of his family members called – won't I please see him. I'm pretty busy but OK, I'll see him. Evidently this guy refuses to acknowledge he's dying, and the family and doctors are very concerned. He's only got a couple of months. He's in a very serious condition but he refuses even to talk about dying or death or anything. Won't you please help him? Oh well, OK, send him in. So I sit down and I ask him, "What do you think about this dying stuff?" He says, "I don't want anything to do with it." [laughter] I said, "Well, fine. What do you think that we should do? They all want us to talk for some reason." He says, "Well I think we should talk about living." I said, "That sounds fine to me." And that's just what we did. For the next couple months, we talked about living. It was interesting – one of the last things he told me was extraordinary. He said, "You know, one of the best things I ever did, that I was most happy doing, was that I was a world-class rumba dancer." Now can you imagine this, like in the 1920s and 1930s, going off to one of these fantastic, exotic places in South America and in Spain and Europe. It's fantastic. There's these scenes of rumba dancing. He actually took a world title. And he was just shining telling these stories. And at the end of the session he rumba'd out of the office. [laughter] He rumba'd down the hall to the front door. By the time I sat back down at my desk, I watched him rumba down the sidewalk to his car.

Audience member: [inaudible]

Steve Flowers: Oh, I forget. I never talked about it. Evidently, it wasn't that painful. But he didn't show up for his next appointment. The daughter said he died that night. [inaudible] He rumba'd right to the grave. And if that's not turning the table on death, I don't know what is.

Audience members: [several inaudible comments]

Audience member: He was probably experiencing pain, but he was rumba-ing through the pain.

52:17

Steve Flowers: Rumba-ing through the pain. He's doing it his way. This is my life, this is my death. I'm going to break out of these things. Everyone's telling me what I should be while I'm aging, all right? I can die my way. Can't I die my way? Can't I live my way? What would it be like if I actually just decided to live my way? I think it's more than just buying a crazy red hat. I mean, cool – red hats are great. But there's more to it, right? I'll really live my life and be who I am. So, we're going to do a little bit of practice, about 10 minutes of practice. And then we're going to take a break. Is that OK? Do we need to take a break right now for anybody? Is it OK to take a break now or do you want to –

Audience member: [inaudible]

Steve Flowers: Soon? OK. So let's practice for about 10 minutes, then we'll take a break. Practicing – what does that mean? It's like piano. It's not that you're never going to get anywhere unless you do this. And the whole work of mindfulness, of meditating, is actually meditating. So that isn't a very difficult thing, really. It's so simple.

[Begins guided meditation]

All you do in this practice is find your breath. Find it wherever you feel it most prominently – your nostrils, or your belly or mouth or chest. Wherever you feel it coming and going all by itself. See if you can stay with that place for the full duration of in breath and the full duration of out breath. Let the breath come normally and naturally. [silence]

And notice the end of the out breath, if you can feel into that space. [inaudible] If you'll notice where the body breathes in, it knows how to breathe you. And you can just let the breath come and go. And you may use the breath and feel a sense of the breath coming and going, as your way to be present. Knowing the body knows how to breathe for you. [silence]

Some people call this “duck meditation.” The belly of the duck is on this ocean, and your attention is this duck, floating on the ocean, with the rising and falling, the ebb and flow of the breath. The tension – the duck rises up on the belly with the in breath and falls back down with the out breath. Nothing to think about. Nothing to do but be present with the sensation. Mindful breathing.

And this can be called a sacred pause – sacred because it's something we so rarely do. To just be still, to just be open. Of course, thoughts come and go. Emotions, other sensations. See if you can relegate all those to the background. While in the foreground there's this breathing happening. Every time that you notice your mind goes somewhere off into the world of thought – future, past or planning. Every time you notice that, turning back to the breath – wherever it is, in breath or out breath. Knowing that every shift discovered is a moment of mindfulness. That's how we cultivate mindfulness, presence. Just be present with the breath. [silence]

And sometimes mindfulness practice will invite an image – not to take you somewhere else, such as visualization of other practices. But in mindfulness our invited image can help you drop deeper into this practice here and now in your body. If you will image a lake, a lake that you know or you've been to, or perhaps one you've seen in a movie or picture. Bring yourself beside the lake. Sit just as you're sitting now. Taking in the whole of the lake and what it's like before you. Notice its size, its breadth, color, smell, coolness and moisture in the air – and what it's like

to be sitting there, beside this great body of water. Becoming so involved with the lake that you lose touch with being somebody separate from the lake and become the lake itself. [inaudible] Only the lake remains. Being the lake, notice what it's like for you. You're all of the lake from bottom to top. All the water -- you are the water. Supported from all sides by the earth. Embraced and held in place. Completely held. Your great weight pressing down and out. On a quiet day with no wind your surface can become so clear and smooth and flat, like a mirror. Anything that enters that, anything that passes by, is respected but never rejected. Receiving everything, refusing nothing. Holding on to nothing. Anything that enters the reflective surface of your mirrorlike mind will leave as something else enters but of course it's not always still is it? And sometimes storms come and becomes windy waters become all agitated, churned up and the winds blow and howl and there are waves and it is frothy but just dropping down within inside yourself a few feet and suddenly it becomes more quiet and as you drop deeper within inside yourself it becomes more and more still and more and more silent. As you are on the lake the surface and the coolness of the earth bottom the deeper you go the more still and quiet it becomes. So all the storms are behind you. You can rest in this peace and stillness. Of course storms come and storms go. And as time and you are ready and you can move up again towards your surface. Come back in to where you are as a lake, all of the lake. Back to where you are watching the lake. Now you can see what it's like to become a lake. What it's like to borrow for a few minutes this powerful image. To join with it. Returning to the breath as it comes and goes.

Maybe ending this brief little practice with a with a little poem from Hafiz [phonetic spelling] who says, "How did the rose is ever open and share with the world all of its beauty? That felt it a resistible presence of light and its being. Otherwise we all remain too frightened." "How did the rose is ever open and share with the world all of its beauty? That felt it a resistible presence of light and its being. Otherwise we all remain too frightened." May all beings be at peace.

Chiming sound.

What are the benefits of aging? Let's hang out without for a few minutes. What are the benefits of aging?

Audience member: You know a lot more people at the end.

Steve Flowers: You know a lot more people? Yes

Audience member: You can say I finally know what I want to be when I grow up.

Audience laughter

Steve Flowers: She finally knew what she wanted to be when she grew up. Yes sir.

Audience member: When I retired which was in 07, I was telling people for the first time in my life, since September 1942, no one is telling me I have to be in school or go to a damn job. This is my time.

Steve Flowers: I can do what I damn well want to do. Benefits of aging? Yes.

Audience member: Recently it occurred to me that I've lived long enough now that I have a point of view [inaudible]. That I....

Audience laughter

Audience member: I don't mean that sarcastically. Seriously actually I've lived long enough that some things make sense. [Inaudible comment] Some things that were true are not true anymore. [Inaudible comment]

Steve Flowers: Wonderful. I can figure out my own way of looking at things. I've got my own way and I can embrace it. Yes.

Audience member: I have the leisure to do what I want to do. That might be writing an essay or it might be a workaday kind of thing. But I have the leisure to do it. And that's wonderful.

Steve Flowers: And that's pretty special. We don't do that when we were kids. Like that story about the woman and the husband and the kids and jobs the full catastrophe of those days. What else?

Audience member: Aging to me does not mean retiring. Aging to me is the physical concept of your body changing.

Steve Flowers: Yes.

Audience member continuing: I'm still lucky so how do I adapt my aging body to my mind [long inaudible comment]

Steve Flowers: Lovely. I wish I would've thought about that two weeks ago when I was at a music event and I was outside in the grass playing with a group of kids. Which was a lot of fun. They were doing handstands and walking on their hands. And I thought well I'll show you how to do it.

Audience laughter

Steve Flowers: What was I thinking?

Audience laughter

Steve Flowers: What on earth possessed me? My shoulder is still sore. I tried. Parts of me still are still a 30-year-old but in this case perhaps a 10-year-old or a six-year-old that refuses to accept you can't walk on your hands anymore, stupid. Yes.

Audience member: You still have the opportunity, if you've chosen not to do it physically to give your advice. I did that when I was your age. I can say I found I did it better this way.

Steve Flowers: Yes.

Audience member continues: We still have something to share.

Steve Flowers: Well yes, that is if you were wise at the moment.

Audience laughter

Steve Flowers: Advantages of aging? Yes.

Audience member: I don't work so hard anymore at having a purposeful life. It tends to be more of a loving life.

Steve Flowers: Sweet.

Audience member: The older I get, the less fear I have.

Steve Flowers: Lovely.

Audience member: When you go to bed every evening, make it peaceful because make every day as if it was the last day of your life. Then at night make peace with the Lord and the world and the [inaudible] and what the world might bring. That's the main thing is accepting... The hardest thing for older people they find out, as the gentleman said, what you could do and do so well all of a sudden you find out you can't. So you just have to accept it. And like you said if you can't do one thing turn around and do another. And find something to make up for that loss.

Steve Flowers: Thank you so much. That is beautiful. You should be teaching this. You do the next one. Yes.

Audience member: My granddaughter came in the other day and she was really all excited because this one said this and that one said that and her friends [inaudible] were going to be, and people in class said blah, blah, blah. And I thought, God it's good to not be caught up in all of that.

Steve Flowers: I've been seeing some teenage girls in the last few years and they come in and, oh my God, I would never want to be a teenage girl. It would be pure hell to be a teenager. The mind catches on fire for the least little problem. When you have the most beautiful body in your life, you're also the ugliest girl in school, right?. What else? Advantages? Yes.

Audience member: I found as I grow older that it is so nice I don't care as much about what people think about me. And a much freer to be who I am.

Steve Flowers: Anybody can relate to that? Isn't that a relief? Oh my God. And you can say, the older you get, you can say just about anything after a while.

Audience laughter

Steve Flowers: Let me say one thing. It made me think of the story. I went to a wedding. It was one of these weddings we watch these two together and you see the groom and you see what is happening and you're going "oh my God this is a disaster". I was at one of those weddings. And the groom had already been in two fist fights after the wedding with the brothers of the bride.

Audience member: Oh wow.

Steve Flowers: And they're drunk, belligerent and using profanity. And oh my God it was just a spectacle to behold. And I was in a position where I really had to go through the line and congratulate them with everybody else. But I didn't know what the heck I was going to say. There was this old woman in front of me, she must've been 89 or 92 or something like that with

a cane. She got in front of him and looked at him and loud enough for everyone to hear and said, "You're an asshole!"

Audience laughter

Steve Flowers: And then she walked over in front of bride and says, "What the hell is wrong with you?"

Audience laughter

Steve Flowers: And kept going. And I was right behind her.

Audience laughter

Steve Flowers: And I didn't even have the guts to say, "What she said."

Audience laughter

Steve Flowers: And everybody in line was looking like, oh God, if we only had the courage to say that. Sorry I used a bad word. You guys know that word. Somebody had something else? Yes.

Audience member: I'm enjoying the recognition that I [inaudible]. So I've noticed that people open doors for me more than they used to. Some people knock into me and almost knock me down. Most people will give me a little space because I'm walking slower than they are. There's a courtesy there that I had not noticed. I really appreciate it. It is very nice. It opens the doors so you can say thank you, you can finally connect and I work with children and so I say I'm old so you have to treat me very gently.

Audience laughter

Steve Flowers: Well you can push a little too far. Plus you get discounts at Thrifty Bargain Mart. Yes sir.

Audience member: Well from the male side of that, the same thing is wonderful, at the same time acknowledging weakness, a physical weakness. An inability to keep up. Having a limp or something. As far as a change in ego structure, something like that.

Steve Flowers: Boy isn't it great to have something like that, an ego structure change. Wouldn't it be great to have it just dissolve altogether. This "me" character that I get so attached to. I love that piece, somebody was sharing that they liked that. I had it up on one of the slides, it had [inaudible]. One of the biggest troubles all of us have is this personality that we get so identified with [inaudible] self, right? What he had to say was, you know, "oh my personality, my personality yes it's been a lot of trouble but I treated more like a pet now". I lover that, you know, I'm so sorry for that, but he does that sometimes. You might make an apology for the dog just did on the rug or something but you are not taking it so personally. It's not about me. Me. The story about me and what I can do, did do and what I shouldn't have done. It is in such a huge deal anymore. What a relief, huh? What a relief.

Somewhere. Were was that? "He who can laugh at himself will never cease to be amused". That's a pretty good way to find your way through. I don't take myself so seriously any more.

People's opinions... That word opinion comes from the root word "pionin". Which is like when they cut the pinion feathers from a bird so it won't fly the coop. Or you drive a stake into the ground so a small boat won't float away. That's a pinion. These opinions can be something that get us stuck. So a lot of our stress reactions have to do with this [inaudible] and this "me" character. What do you think about me? How are you judging me? Oh God, I hope you don't judgment anything like I judge me. I spent all of college and high school it was pure hell with this. That I was afraid in college that professors would realize what a complete nutcase I was. So hiding, pretending and finding my way out of this kind of need to perform in some way. That opens up the door to something called authenticity. It opens up the door to being real with one another. That's where we have a chance to meet one another with no longer putting on airs. We are no longer performing. We are no longer pretending. We are not trying to impress. We are not trying to get something from you. What you think about me, do you think I'm okay? Oh my goodness it's a nightmare isn't it to get stuck with somebody like that? It's even more of a nightmare to have it in your head. And I've had it in my head. Anybody else had this in their head?

Audience murmurs

Steve Flowers: Am I okay? Do you think I'm okay?

Audience murmurs

Steve Flowers: It's a nightmare. You're even bigger trouble if you find somebody that does think you're okay because you know there's got to be something wrong with him.

Audience laughs

Steve Flowers: We learned to accept our flaws. Also consider that anyone that is in here can look back over your life ever make any mistakes?

Audience laughter

Steve Flowers: Has anybody in here beaten themselves up about their mistakes?

Audience murmurs

Steve Flowers: I've actually [inaudible] for my mistakes. The bad dad. I've got all kinds of mistakes. I can dredge them up. And I can wallow in them. So this book about self forgiveness is very, very real. And it's a practice. I gave you one of these practices in these handouts. There all these handouts left behind back there as you're going out every week. But if you didn't get them all please do. One of them is a forgiveness practice. I forgive myself for the injuries I have caused myself knowingly and unknowingly. Out of my own greed, out of my own fear, out of my own delusion. May I be free from pain and suffering. I forgive myself. I forgive others for the injuries they have caused me. As we find our way out of the blame, the blame we carry is the same as any other kind of suffering it becomes this weight. The hatred we feel for Hitler, doesn't bother Hitler. What about the hatred, what kind of role does it play in my life? What about the blame? And sometimes I might look to think, what I want to set it down, do I really want to keep carrying this. So forgiveness doesn't mean that I'm letting someone off the hook for what they did. It means they have to deal with their own karma. But I no longer want to carry the burden of the anger and the blaming and the judging, right? And let them deal with it. I don't want to have dinner with them. I just don't want to carry them around inside of me anymore with the self talk.

That is a forgiveness practice. You see if you let go a little, you get a little happiness. If you let it go a lot, you get a lot of happiness. If you let go completely, you get complete happiness. How much do you want to let go? How much do you want let go? What you have been dredging up? But it's not easy is it, some of these things? Particularly when it's ourselves that is the rat fink. So, so practicing being [inaudible] is the practice of mindfulness at its core, it's not judging, its core is non-striving. It's being with. And that wonderful phrase from John Cameron said that "healing is coming to terms with things as they are." Healing is coming to terms with things as they are. [Inaudible] finer way out of consciousness that always wants things to be better. Wants them to be better, once the world to be better, wants ourselves to be better. Which is always the critic, right? Looking at what's wrong. How many times do we look to see what's right with us? We are experts at looking what's wrong with us and everybody else. What is right with us? Maybe just hanging out with what is right with us is a really good thing.

More time to reflect. Someone said that. Less concerned with everybody's opinion

I like this. This is from a fifth Zen patriarch who says, "The older I get the less I know. Someday I will know absolutely nothing."

Audience laughter

Steve Flowers: But when I was a college student I knew everything. I was a graduate student just ask me and I would tell you. The older I get the less I know. Someday I'll know absolutely nothing.

Actually I find some comfort and mystery [inaudible]. Why do I always have to be making sense out of everything, right? And to figure everything out and be the know-it-all. It is nice to hang out with not knowing. It is comfortable.

Did I tell you guys the story about a Rabbi and the town cop? Where are you going Rabbi? Well I should tell you that story. Well it's a village long time. There's a town square. The town cop is always in the town square at six in the morning. And every morning the Rabbi goes through the town square and goes to the synagogue and he opens up. This happens day after day and year after year, decade after decade. And one night as the Rabbi was approaching the cop who was in a bad mood. Hooligans all night, rat finks, and trouble, problems. And as the Rabbi approached him he said, "Where are you going Rabbi?" And the Rabbi said I don't know. And the cop went postal and he started screaming, "How dare you say you don't know. How dare you tease me, the police. I'll show you. I'll show everybody you don't tease the police. You know exactly where you're going Rabbi. You go to open the synagogue every morning. Well I'll show you, I'll show you how to tease the police. I'll show everybody. For that Rabbi you can spend the rest of the day in the Kalabus! And he's pushing him along shouting, cussing, opens up the jail cell but before it can push him in the jail cell the old Rabbi turns and says "See I told you".

Audience laughter

Steve Flowers: Where you going? Where are you going? Do you really know you are going? Can you really know what you're going to do? How many times have you come to a different place in your life and realized, oh, now this. And you let go of something and suddenly you are in a different place, you have a different value. You shift out of some wall you were pressed in and the whole world opens up to you. The world you didn't even know you had. You see things, you know things, you hear things but you have to let go of something. Like the story of Me. The

Me character and concepts I have and the things I've been clinging onto. Make room for something new, right? But it's hard to let go. It's the clinging. So it's considered clinging. Hold it, just grab it. It's one of the sources of greatest suffering. I don't want to let go. It's what I want. That's the whole piece about egocentricity I showed in our first series. So we just don't get here overnight cultivating these kinds of skills. We have to work at it. And so I started meditating when I got drafted into the Air Force. I got drafted into the Army but I snuck in to in the Air Force during the Vietnam War so I wouldn't have to go out into the jungle. I thought I could avoid getting killed that way. I didn't want to go in, I was a peacenik. Not to mention a hippie. I didn't like war or fighting or anything. I had never hurt anybody and never wanted to hurt anybody. I was in to peace and love and all that stuff. So I got into the Air Force and I was scared to death and that was when I first started to meditate because they kept trying to send me to Vietnam. And I managed to get out of it. They gave me direct orders twice and they were threatening a third one and I managed to talk my way out of each one of them. Which was like a miracle in wartime, you don't talk your way out of orders. I started meditating in earnest then it also got out and I've been at it ever since. So many years of practice mostly for some reason as others have said fear. I wanted to stop creating so much unnecessary suffering in my own life and then I realized that I am the one that creates most of my own suffering. With my own mind. There are a lot of problems right out there. I realized I'm the one that creates most of my suffering and I'm fighting against what is because I'm caught up with my worst imaginations and catastrophes of what's going to happen. I'm giving myself a hard time for what I did or shouldn't have done. I'm so caught up with my mind and my ego and what others think of me. What I need to do. What I'm going to do when I grow up and having to do all of these things. Myself doubts. Meditation can be a place of refuge. A place of non-doing. A place where I can find some skill. Finding my way out of this self talk. Out of the thoughts and emotions and habits of mind that I lived in. And from there I've been at it ever since. So just to, to [inaudible] so it would be the same for everyone that really wants to get more free to daily practice. I have some cds out there and there's a bunch on my website. To do a daily practice of sitting meditation, a yoga meditation, [inaudible], a walking meditation, guided by a [inaudible] meditation. Some way of being present on purpose without judging for formal practice each day. Reality the core of everything we can talk and talk and we can read, read, read. We can laugh about some of these things. There's a lot of interesting things here. But really the only real value you get from mindfulness practice is doing it. It is really hard to do it on our own. So it is really very helpful to do with others. To sit with others. One of the things that is possible for you guys , really everyone with Passages really wants to that we are going to set up a follow-up program that is available for you to come and sit. To spend an hour or so every week doing a sitting practice with a skilled teacher, other people like we're seeing in here where you can get together with others people like consciousness and start sharing and speaking. Discovery things together and talk we learn more from one another. And so I'd like to introduce my friend Nancy Brown who is a meditation teacher for long a long time. Yeah stand up and ...

Nancy Brown: Hi.

Steve Flowers: She's graciously made herself available. Do you want to say anything about you?

Nancy Brown: I really appreciate being here with all of you. Hearing your thoughts and reflections on what Steve has been wonderfully teaching. He is a gifted teacher and because I resonate about myself I been a meditator for, I forget how long, over 35 years or something. But, I'm still a human being and as I age, I've noticed the changes and I don't like them and don't like the aging of the body part. I like the mindfulness part but the body aging part, I think well wait a minute [chuckle]. I kind of had this negative cast on aging because aged wine is,

delicious, expensive really nice wine. Aged cheese also but when you look in your refrigerator and you see the aged vegetables and fruit, you know, it's like what you do. I've got to get rid of those. And so recently I turned the big 80 and I thought oh my gosh. And I thought I'm not an old 80. I'm an elder.

Audience: murmurs

Nancy Brown: And I like thinking of elderhood. And growing into elderhood. And with mindfulness and heartfulness if we can find that it easier to embrace aging, elderhood, and maybe enhance it. So I appreciate what Steve has been teaching me to open up. [Inaudible] Well I'm done Steve. [Laughing]

Steve Flowers: I was going to sit down.

Nancy Brown: Thank you Steve.

Steve Flowers: Thanks Nancy. She's a fantastic teacher. She has been leading a meditation group in Chico for many, many years.

So on the back table here I've kind of put a sign-up sheet for anybody's interested in learning more about a weekly sitting group where you can learn more about mindfulness and compassion practices. And actually make them your own. And get some instruction to do that and share some time with others that are engaged in the same work. I've got a group of my own that I've been working with for many years as well. It's just great to sit with other people. For one thing you don't have to after 10 minutes decide this is impossible and my mind is driving me crazy and I'm hungry and go to the refrigerator. You actually stay put because you don't want to bother everybody else. And there's actually something about being with others that are engaged and [inaudible] stillness, silence and working with this mind and finding a way in and out of it's machinations. And it can support you to go further sometimes, deeper. So I strongly encourage that and if you don't want to sign in today or look into it any further, I think you can also contact Passages. We haven't set up the times, we haven't set up the structure, but we do want to make it available to you to have some resource to go further with this. As far as I'm concerned, I'm going to be offering this it will be for no cost. I think Nancy would do the same. It would be more for donations if you want to leave a few bucks to help pay for the facility. It would be fine.

So just hearing that would anybody in here be interested in doing such a thing?

Audience member: Is there a location chosen?

Steve Flowers: Well, one of them is in my office suite. Maybe at your place. We are still just looking at how we can do it. It happens to be at the end of the fiscal year with Passages and trying to figure out new things can be complicated. You haven't wrapped up the old things yet. If you are leave your name and think about it and call if you want. You can call me or Passages. We will bring you aboard and you can start deepening and learning these practices. It is one thing to think about it. It's one thing to read about it. It is another thing to really do it.

So I really don't have any idea what time it is because my phone died. I thought it was pretty clever. Oh, quarter of.

We've got a little time, so let's kind of go over what we've done. Does that seem like a good thing? And I brought... I wrote down some of the things. And see if you guys remember since

most of you were here for all of them. So the first event, what is mindfulness and mindfulness stress reduction. I went over the practice of mindfulness, about presence, a purpose without judging. We talked about striving. Mindfulness [inaudible] stress reduction program John Cabot's. We talked a lot about mindfulness in perception. Interpretations, stand between us in everything we experience. We don't see things as they are. We see things as we are. Our way we look at things transforms things. And we get stuck in certain thoughts and emotions that create the stress. We get stuck in them. And that's getting stuck in a stress reaction. Mindfulness and compassion can help us get unstuck. And mindfulness and compassion help us get unstuck. I went over mindfulness and compassion brain research which showed you all those neat things about how the brain changes with practice. I discussed the value of distress tolerance. How we need to grow in distress tolerance to manage to keep our center and balance even when things are really, really stressful. And we talked about the value of connecting with others as a way of healing, of transforming, of growing.

The second event I talked about anxiety and depression. I talked about anxiety [inaudible] thinking, anxiety thoughts about the future, anticipating [inaudible] thinking, depressive ruminations. I talked about ruminations as we go over things, and over things. How we create and we get stuck in anxiety and depression by our way of thinking and worrying. And I talked about some work by Stephen Proges. That he's reached [inaudible] all of these things, things in the [inaudible] nerve. And he can study things in our ancient development and heritage. We have a negative bias that we've inherited from our ancestors to look for what's wrong and dangerous and troublesome. And worry about them. And those are the ones that survived. They were our grandparents. The ones that were like happy go lucky, tip toeing through the tulips, did not survive. The ones that were worried, anxious, frightened, looking for trouble, those were our ancestors. Those narrative based default network of our brains, as they discovered and researched, brain research of the last few years. Our default network of the brain is that part that is going over the story of "me". What I did. What I shouldn't have done. What I wish I would've done. What someone did to me. The stories, the stories. And that is the source of most of our suffering. It's called the narrative based self.

And the other one was about the here and now self. I talked about avoidance as a form of pathogenesis. And finally in that week I talked about recognize, release, replace, let be, let go, let in. We can notice what our mind's doing. We can release we see that are going to cause trouble. We can replace those things with loving and kindness practice, with compassion practice, self-forgiveness practice. We can put more energy into what we do want rather than what we don't want.

We learned about caregivers in the third week. We talked about the value that caregivers are often ignoring themselves and don't realize how much they are suffering and I think this is just what they're supposed to do and failed to care for themselves. They too need lots of compassion and lots of love and lots of TLC. And we talked about the difference of compassion and empathy. The peace about we can't make things better but we can treat ourselves better. About how we can take care of ourselves [inaudible - microphone fell]. That we can practice mindfulness. We can practice loving kindness. We can practice self compassion. We cultivate equanimity. And if nothing else works we can practice sympathetic joy. Do you guys remember what that is?

These are all like tools we draw from to survive in the flames and not make it worse ourselves. Remember I talked about living wholeheartedly or halfheartedly. If you're living halfheartedly it could kill you. That if you really want to have a vibrant aging, health. See how wholeheartedly you can live to throw yourself completely into whatever you are doing. Whatever it is. That really

too much for ourselves just by putting our all into whatever it is we're doing. It's a great value in cultivating a shared humanity practice.

Here we are in the fourth event talking about aging, bodies. So here's the thing about aging bodies, they're going one direction, right, they're not going back. For all the advances in modern medicine, there still one death per person.

Audience murmurs and nervous laughter.

Steve Flowers: We're all going to get to the finish line. We are all going to get to the finish line. And what are we still doing well were still here? And so many people, you guys brought so many wonderful things here today. I hope you see what wonderful, good teachers you are to one another. And just given the chance when you get a chance to talk about the things that really matter. And share with one another and open up and reveal and even looking yourself with the wisdom that's in here. Don't imagine that there's some great teachers that have all the wisdom or great books or great master. That it's all inside of you if you really just start turning inward looking and listening to yourself and to one another, wow! Wisdom you know it's very expensive. It's very expensive. It takes a long time to grow and many troubles before you grow it. So when we get a chance to be with one another and remind one another and to be able to share some of the things we've discovered this is the best so a shared humanity to get together with others to be able to talk about the things that really matter is a real gift to yourself.

So anything else before we bring the series to a close? Comments, questions.

Audience member: Let me get in trouble for this. But let me think the [inaudible] Buddha for writing the [inaudible] 1500 years before Christ. [Long inaudible comment] ... Breath. We actually study and apply verbatim today.

Steve Flowers: We work with mindfulness in a secular sense.

[microphone falls]

Steve Flowers: This thing just doesn't want to stay on.

This is been around for thousands of years. Thousands of years. As a practice though it remains the same just as we've been doing. We can find our breath and find yourself in the present moment and find your way out of the machinations of the mind and stop creating so much unnecessary suffering in our lives.

Anything else? Well let's say something about Passages. Don't they totally rock for making this kind of thing available?

Audience applauds

Steve Flowers: All the money, all the time, all the man-hours, woman hours, all the effort has been made to do this for us. I think it is totally cool. We're very lucky to have this organization. And people like Chris in our lives. I'm also now entering into my 65th year. I'm just now getting my counseling from many carefree weeks ago. Thank you guys it's been a joy. Thank you so very much.