



FLORIDA BAR NEWS

THE MINDFUL LAWYER: MINDFULNESS 'ISN'T A BUMP-FREE RIDE'

By Scott Rogers ▶ Special to the News ▶ Columns

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Mindfulness tends to reveal its benefits — whether it be moments of clarity and calm, being less overcome by impulses and feeling emotionally reactive, or experiencing greater focus and concentration — to those who set aside time to practice. And for many, these shifts in attention, emotional steadiness, and clarity may begin to be realized shortly after establishing a regular practice. This is not to

say that these changes are fully realized or don't fluctuate. After all, mindfulness is the journey of a lifetime, and the moments of our life are unpredictable, ever changing, and can be painful. Still, many do report that they experience meaningful shifts early on, and this can inspire practice.

The practicing of mindfulness itself, however, can be quite challenging, especially if one is in search of change or in need of a quick fix. An important insight that tends to emerge in time is that the true value of practice resides in cultivating a greater awareness of and gratitude for the moments of our life than it is about fixing moments that do not meet our expectations. Fortunately for those of us who are interested in a return on our investment of time, both can be experienced.

Given our busy lives, sitting each day and practicing can add to feelings of stress and some will decide it's not for them. This month's question is posed by an attorney just starting to practice who is finding it challenging to do so. Possibly on the verge of giving up, he writes:

I've just begun practicing mindfulness — sitting each day for 15 minutes, listening to a guided practice — and am finding it challenging. I feel antsy and my thoughts do not seem to be complying. Is this a sign I should abandon the project?

I shared this important question with Jon Krop, a former public interest attorney turned mindfulness teacher who has practiced mindfulness for more than a decade and studied with teachers from around the world. Jon offers this thoughtful reply, borne of his own experience:

First of all, congratulations on sitting every day! You mentioned it in passing like it's no big deal, but it's a massive accomplishment. My teacher John Yates says establishing a daily practice is the hardest part of meditation, and I agree. Meditators struggle for years to accomplish what you've managed to do as a newbie. You're way ahead of the curve.

It sounds like you're finding meditation a bit uncomfortable, and you're wondering if that says something about your abilities. It doesn't. Mindfulness meditation is a wonderful, transformative practice, but it isn't always comfortable. Sometimes sitting will be soothing or even blissful, but other times you may feel restless or agitated. You may even experience painful emotions like anger or fear. These are normal meditative experiences. Unfortunately, they don't get as much publicity as the warm and fuzzy stuff, so people end up wondering if they're "doing it wrong."

In short, this isn't a bump-free ride. A big part of meditation is learning to navigate those bumps with equanimity so you can do the same with challenges in your daily life. If the practice were 100 percent smooth, you wouldn't have that valuable growth opportunity.

You mentioned that your thoughts don't "comply." They don't need to! There's a common misconception that meditation is about emptying your mind of thoughts. Actually, you can let your thoughts come and go as normal. Just set an intention not to follow those thoughts or get caught up in them — and if you do get caught up, gently let go. To your credit, you are aware that thoughts are arising, and developing and refining this awareness is key.

My suggestion: when you feel antsy, just note the antsiness and return to your practice — be it paying attention to the breath, the body, or whatever form it takes. When a thought pulls your attention away, note the thought and return. You don't have to fight the antsiness, the thoughts, or anything else.

Meditation is resilient; it can incorporate and accommodate anything that arises within it.

Jon's response is an important reminder that mindfulness meditation can be, at times, a bumpy ride and that the bumpiness is part of the practice. His suggestion of "noting" and "returning" is fundamental to practice. You will learn more about this instruction as you read about mindfulness and listen to guided practices, and you will become increasingly adept as doing so, as you continue to practice.

You can learn more about Jon and his work through his organization, Mindfulness for Lawyers. Thank you, Jon, for your work in this area and for taking time to respond to this month's mindfulness inquiry.

If you have a question about integrating mindfulness into the practice of law that you would like answered in this column, send it to srogers@law.miami.edu.



*Scott Rogers, M.S., J.D., is a nationally recognized leader in the area of mindfulness in law and founded and directs the University of Miami School of Law's Mindfulness in Law Program where he teaches mindful ethics, mindful leadership, mindfulness and negotiation, and mindfulness in law. He is the creator of Jurisight, one of the first CLE programs in the country to integrate mindfulness and neuroscience and conducts workshops and presentations on the role of mindfulness in legal education and across the legal profession. He is author of the recently released, **"The Mindful Law Student: A Mindfulness in Law Practice Guide,"** written for all audiences.*