

Neither Kethledge nor Newport, in exhorting the importance of solitude, are talking about mindfulness meditation. For readers who find the practice of mindfulness to be a daunting enterprise, or are intrigued by the subject of solitude, you may enjoy reading about it from the perspective of these writers.

There is a wonderful point of intersection where solitude and mindfulness meet, and it is on this interior collaboration of the mind that this column closes the year. If you are in an environment largely isolated from the *inputs of other minds* (e.g., no podcasts, music, conversation, art, or, yes, even a good book), you are in a state of solitude. Since periods of solitude are increasingly hard to come by, let alone sustain, it is all the more important to seek them out. Once established, you can structure such periods to serve your intellectual and emotional interests.

Let's consider the routine activity of eating lunch to explore solitude and mindfulness. Perhaps you are in your office, at a restaurant, or at home. Solitude? It depends. If you watching a YouTube video, reading texts, or listening to music, you are not in solitude. The experience may be worthwhile but it does not constitute solitude. A shift into solitude is an undoing of sorts — a simplifying, a letting go. And, as Newport points out, periods of solitude are necessary for a meaningful processing and absorption of all the information you take in during the day.

So how might you practice solitude? Here are a few suggestions. Invite your mind to daydream — to intentionally meander in a way that is light and playful. Research on the benefits of daydreaming is compelling. But note, the mind left unattended runs the risk of moving into rumination and catastrophizing. The point being that you can't simply check out. You could turn your attention to the food itself, slowly savoring each bite. Here is a sweet spot where solitude and mindfulness meet in a practice known as "mindful eating." So too, you could use the time to think intentionally through a problem or reflect on your life, doodle, journal, or do anything else that pairs you with yourself.

Justice Stephen Breyer has been practicing solitude for years. He once shared that twice a day for between 10 to 15 minutes, "I sit peacefully. I relax and think about nothing or as little as possible." Solitude.

In *Digital Minimalism*, Newport writes of Thoreau eating lunch outdoors by a lake, upon finishing his meal, reading the paper wrapped around his lunch, and then journaling his reflections on the environment. This

is a nice coming together of mindful eating, focused reading, and reflective journaling. Inspired by Thoreau's culinary routine, below is a lunch-time solitude practice you might try:

1. Bring lunch to your office or sit outside and minimize distractions — people, devices, music.
2. Before you begin eating, spend a few minutes with your thoughts. Reflect on your morning, consider the afternoon sky, turn to your plans for the evening. Whether deliberate or spontaneous, follow your mind wherever it goes.
3. Begin to eat, slowly. If “mindful eating” is appealing to you, savor your food by attending to the various senses engaged, e.g., sight, taste, smell, and touch. As an alternative, bring something meaningful to mind, perhaps gratitude. You can use your lunch as a period to reflect on your good fortune and those whose kindness and generosity has made a difference in your life.
4. When you finish eating, extend the period of solitude a little longer, taking a few extra moments to enjoy chewing — this time on your experience.

Solitude is an adaptable practice that you can curate in many ways. Practicing mindfulness, especially unguided or lightly guided, is itself a practice of solitude.

As the year comes to a close and the busy, exciting, joyful, and emotionally tender moments of your life unfold, reflect on the ways you can spend meaningful time with yourself. Not only might you find it to be calming, refreshing, and productive, but it can also enrich the moments you spend with family and friends celebrating your time together journeying through this precious life.

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



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