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THE MINDFUL LAWYER: CONSIDER YOGA AND MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

By Scott Rogers ▶ Special to the News ▶ Columns

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There was a time, in recent memory, when yoga was unfamiliar to many and regarded as an esoteric practice not particularly relevant to one's life. Today that has changed, a shift that speaks for itself. Some see parallels between yoga and meditation, and indeed, not only is meditation, and in particular mindfulness meditation, gaining in popularity, but we are witnessing the emergence of

meditation-only studios. Just as you can visit a yoga studio to take a yoga class, often from various traditions, so too you can visit a meditation studio and take a group class, practicing one of a variety of different types of meditation.

Interestingly, even though meditation has always been a central component in the yogic tradition, some Westernized approaches to yoga have focused primarily on its body movement aspect, leaving many to regard it as more of an athletic endeavor than a contemplative practice. With the popularity of mindfulness meditation, many yoga teachers are beginning to bring meditative practices more explicitly into their teaching, and many yoga teachers are, themselves, learning about meditation and its historic place within yoga.

The natural relationship between the two is worth reflecting on as it can enrich one's yoga practice, and deepen one's understanding of mindfulness. And indeed, more and more people who have long practiced yoga are beginning to engage in formal meditation practice, and many interested in meditation, are expanding their horizons by taking a yoga class. Given this fundamental relationship, we thought it would be informative to speak with an attorney who practices both yoga and mindfulness meditation. Christina Sava, an attorney who has practiced yoga and mindfulness meditation for many years, shared her thoughts:

Mindfulness and yoga are actually more related than they are different, but the terms are being commonly used to describe two different disciplines. Both have made their way to us from Eastern traditions. Yoga

has its foundations in Hinduism, but the way yoga is commonly practiced in the West has no religious affiliation. Similarly, many approaches to mindfulness have roots in Buddhism, but you do not have to be a Buddhist to study or practice mindfulness. In fact, there is much more to both traditions than meditation and the adjustment of body postures, though these are the features that dominate the public's understanding of them.

Both yoga and mindfulness are but one piece of a design for living that brings us into greater harmony with ourselves and the world around us. The yoga practiced in a studio, on a mat, is actually one of eight components or "limbs" of the yogic philosophy (known as asana). Similarly, mindfulness meditation is but one or two components of what is more fully known as the "noble eightfold path."

Of course, you could go to a yoga class with no interest in meditating, as many do, and still get plenty of benefit from the physical "asana" practice. You can also practice mindfulness meditation and have no interest in trying yoga. The two practices, however, complement each other quite well and have overlapping elements.

Most notably, many of the instructions given in a yoga class align with mindfulness practice, namely, to bring awareness to the breath and notice sensations in the body. Yoga classes sometimes end with a brief period of sitting meditation, and the mind is often noticeably calmer at the end of class. In fact, yoga postures were originally practiced by Eastern sages to prepare the body to sit comfortably for long periods of meditation.

Mindfulness practices also invite us to bring awareness to the breath and body. From a practical perspective, grounding attention in the body can facilitate a toning down of thoughts swirling in the mind. By being more attuned to our inner experience, we may become less reactive in general. Other forms of mindfulness practice, like mindful walking and mindful eating, also ask us to rest awareness more fully in the body. In both yoga and mindfulness meditation, the breath is often used as an anchor for attention, and so a yoga class is a great place to start cultivating a more visceral awareness of the breath.

Regular yoga practice supports our efforts at becoming more mindful, and a mindfulness practice makes us more attuned and present on the yoga mat. While I believe there is a style of yoga for everyone, one need not be interested in yoga to try mindfulness. When practiced together their benefits may be

accelerated, but both are hugely beneficial on their own. Personally, I find that the two help reinforce each other, and my practice of both is richer as a result, and the benefits I experience are more fully realized, both in the challenging work I do practicing law, and in my personal life. My own journey started out with a dedicated physical yoga practice, which eventually helped foster a regular meditation practice as well. It's wonderful that today the connection between them is better known and taught.

I am grateful to Christina for taking time to share with us her thoughts on the connection between yoga and mindfulness. Christina is a graduate of Miami Law, where she was president of the law student mindfulness organization, the Insightful Mind Initiative. She is a certified yoga instructor and regularly speaks to attorney organizations about mindfulness. She sits on the Member Resources Team of the ABA's Young Lawyers Division where she helps plan mental health related programming. Christina is a regulatory compliance attorney at Anthony Law Group in Oakland, California.

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.



*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.*