



## FLORIDA BAR NEWS

### FOUR MINDFULNESS PRACTICES FOR THESE TIMES

By Scott Rogers ▶ Special to the News ▶ Columns

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We live in exciting times. We live in challenging times. And some of the excitement and challenge arises because the future is, by its very nature, uncertain and uncertainty can be a source of anxiety and alarm that compromises wellbeing, workflow, and relationships. The uncertainty surrounding the upcoming election along with the many health, economic, social, and educational concerns that loom for many of us adds to the heaviness of this moment in time.

At such times we can find ourselves motivated to do something to feel less stressed. In this month's column we'll consider four primary mindfulness practices that you may find helpful. We'll consider how each, in its own way, bolsters innate capacities we have always drawn upon for our well-being, productivity, and survival. As such, these practices offer a fairly direct route to sustain and develop essential qualities we may take for granted—or assume are outside of our control—that are needed today as much as ever.

#### FOCUSED ATTENTION: A STABLE ATTENTION

The focused attention practice, perhaps the most common and frequently practiced, has three straightforward instructions: (1) focus attention on an object, (2) with the intention to stay with attentive to the object, and (3) when you notice that your attention has wandered from the object, redirect attention to the object. A popular object of attention is the breath as it both is portable and can contribute to the calming potential of the practice.

Imagine what your life would be like if you had no control over your attention—if you could not *direct* it at will (e.g., to a book, person, or memory), if you were unable to *realize* when it wandered (e.g., worrying about the future, ruminating about the past, distracted by an enticing stimulus) and if you could not *redirect* it? We depend heavily on these three capacities and may take them for granted. When they

are in full force we thrive and, when they are diminished, such as when we are stressed or exhausted, our wellbeing and performance may be compromised.

The focused attention exercise is helpful for developing a more stable attention, which in turn support greater emotional balance as we are less likely to be pulled away by unsettling news, social media chatter, or the internal voice of worry and concern. You can listen to a 10-minute Focused Attention practice by [clicking here](#).

#### BODY SCAN: EMOTIONAL BALANCE AND EQUANIMITY

The Body Scan is a form of focused attention practice that centers on the body. Rather than remain with a single object, e.g., the breath, attention is redirected every few moments to a nearby region. Central to the practice is noticing body sensations with granularity (e.g., tension, tingling, vibration, warmth) and whether they are pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. As with the focused attention practice, when one realizes the mind has wandered, attention is redirected to the object, which in this practice is a region of the body.

Imagine what it would be like to not be able to maneuver attention in a methodical way—for example, from person to person in a board meeting, from reading a case to scanning an email, from detecting hunger pangs to visualizing the food in a refrigerator? And perhaps most importantly, imagine what it would be like to react instantly and impulsively to every pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral experience without the capacity to consider the experience and reflect on a useful course of action. These are capacities we already possess which are essential to wise decision-making. In the Body Scan practice (which many find helpful for sleep), in noting the quality of body sensations, be they pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, *and remaining with the practice*, one cultivates greater resilience in the face of experiences that might otherwise lead to grasping, aversion, or a restless search for something more stimulating.

In today's world, consider how the news we receive, the conversations we have, and the circumstances we find ourselves in are infused with varying degrees of pleasant and unpleasant qualities, and of the importance of being less reactive and putting a little more space between the stimulus and our response. You can listen to a 15-minute Body Scan practice by [clicking here](#).

#### OPEN MONITORING: PATIENCE AND RECEPTIVITY

This practice, which depends on the stable attention that is developed through the focused attention and body scan exercises, is a “witnessing” practice. Rather than fixing attention on an object, Open Monitoring involves expanding the field of awareness beyond the body and breath to observe the arising, changing, and passing away of phenomena, be they external like sounds, smells, and sights, or internal, like thoughts and feelings.

Throughout the day we are bombarded by competing stimulation coming at us from all directions. E-mails, texts, assignments, news, people, demands, food, exhaustion, social media. To function well, it is essential to be able to observe this stimulation, assess its relevance, exercise impulse control, and prioritize and attend to what is needed while disregarding what can wait or would prove counterproductive.

Imagine what it would be like to not have this faculty. After all we never know what will happen next and can become overwhelmed if unable to hold steady amid the fast paced, volatile and complex world we know as the moments of our life. You can listen to a 15-minute Open Monitoring practice by [clicking here](#).

#### CONNECTION/LOVINGKINDNESS: KIND HEARTED AND NONJUDGMENTAL

The Lovingkindness or Connection practice involves wishing kindness to ourselves and other people, ranging from those we are very fond of to those with whom we are experiencing difficulties. The standard set of well wishes are to be happy, safe, healthy, and at ease, and one is encouraged to modify these as needed so as to settle upon phrases that have personal resonance. Through the repetition of such phrases, a less judgmental, more open-hearted attitude may be felt on a more regular basis. We all have the capacity to spread warmth and kindness and to wish others well. Difficult moments and challenging times can, as with all of the fundamental capacities addressed in this article, impede the flow of these positive and affirming emotional states.

Many of us know the anger, resentment, and hostility that can be aroused amid certain conversations—both in professional and personal spheres. Emotions are useful data and can inspire and energize. They can also cloud judgment, compromise effective words and deeds, and compromise health and well-being. The Lovingkindness practice can help bolster our innate capacities for connection and to take things less personally, so that we might be less depleted and overwhelmed, and to help us thrive in

difficult interpersonal situations. You can listen to a 15-minute Lovingkindness/Connection practice by [clicking here](#).

## INTENTIONALITY OF THE FOUR PRACTICES

The four practices discussed—which are found in a great many mindfulness training programs—are help develop four fundamental capacities we already possess as human beings. Were our neuroanatomy perfected, these capacities of focus, body awareness, receptivity and warmth and connection, might very well persist in an optimal state notwithstanding challenging circumstances that come our way. Each of us knows moments where these qualities express themselves as a natural aspect of our nature. We also know situations that can be overly taxing in which some or all of these qualities are diminished. This column focuses on the value of the various practices from the perspective of mental training that can augment and refine these capacities. Paradoxically, when these capacities are most compromised, we are least likely to realize it.

The crucial ingredient to these practices is that they are intentional and deliberate—whereas the very capacities their train are spontaneous and natural. The touchstone of their efficacy resides in their simplicity; they invite us to do the very thing we do naturally, without even trying, appreciating that we can deliberately exercise these capacities to repair, sustain, and develop them. Perhaps now is as good a time as any to give one of a them a try.

Among the many Apps available, the free “Insight Timer” app contains many versions of these practices offered by many different teachers. Each Friday you are invited to attend the 12-minute “Mindfulness for the Legal Profession” guided practice offered free to members of the legal profession from 12:30-12:45.

Register by [clicking here](#).



*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.*