

MEDITATING – EVEN LAWYERS DO IT. By Glenn Kadish

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This is going to sound like a punch line to a joke. We're sitting in large room at Seattle Center listening to a seminar given by Jack Kornfield/¹ and a professor who studied the effects of meditation on people. We're listening about how great meditation is and how it helps everyone, when Jack Kornfield says, "There are even mediation retreats for lawyers". That line got the biggest laugh of the day. Most of the 500 people there were mental health professionals who could get continuing education credits.

As a lawyer who had been meditating for a little while, hearing about lawyers and meditation made me sit up and listen. (I laughed as well.) When I got home, I found that there really was a meditation retreat for lawyers. Of course, it was being given in Marin County. Well, I went to it. Imagine 100 lawyers and law students at a silent retreat in a former convent in Santa Rosa, California. The first day, I was walking after mediating, and thought, "Boy, it would have been a lot more pleasant to go to Hawaii and lay on a beach". But it wasn't. The retreat was great and the practice of meditating has helped me to become a better person and lawyer.

What is true is that lawyers who meditate find that it helps them to be much better lawyers and reduces stress and problems with other lawyers, clients and their staff. They have found that meditation practice has sharpened their legal skills, helped them to manage the stresses of their challenging work, increased their empathy, and deepened their commitment to creating a more just society. Those last two reasons are why most of us went to law school. We wanted to help people and change the world.

I thought meditating would be easy. All the benefits that the professor and others touted sounded great. The idea is to quietly sit or walk for 20 to 45 minutes at a time and let your thoughts flow, but not to concentrate on those thoughts. You are supposed to pay attention to your breath. That works for the first 30 seconds, maybe. Then you start thinking about that case you just finished trying and that question you didn't ask and why the judge allowed that objection and then the witness who didn't show up. Back to breathing. What about that guy who sat next to you on the airplane and he sure looked like someone from high school and on and on. Oops, back to breathing. It's not easy. Just as we practice law, one practices meditation.

¹/ Kornfield is a famous teacher and author on meditation and Buddhism in the U.S. www.jackkornfield.com

It works though. My stress level is much lower than before. I am much more rested than before. (Guess what, stress tires you out.) My staff may not agree, but I listen better, think through my responses and react less in negative terms. Clients are much easier to deal with. I don't seem to have as many problem clients.

We all know there are situations in our legal practice that are difficult to get through. I and other lawyers have found that meditation has helped us when that difficult opposing counsel tempts us to respond in a less than professional manner, or when that brief or contract seems impossible to finish. The collateral benefits are that you also find it easier to deal with family and friends.

If you are still reading this, you may ask why do we need to be with lawyers to meditate? We have specialized issues as lawyers that other professions or occupations do not have. All lawyers know what they are. The meditation teachers who work with lawyers understand those issues and work with them. Some are lawyers and others are people who work closely with lawyers. Part of meditation is listening to talks about issues that come up and figuring out what to do with the issues.

It is becoming a popular course in law schools as well. Harvard Law School and UC Berkeley Law School are just two schools now giving meditation courses for law students.

If you want to learn more about law and meditation, the organization that is working on this stuff goes by the fairly weird name of **The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society**. Their web site is <http://www.contemplativemind.org/programs/law>

Here are some articles on it as well.

“Zen And The Art Of Lawyering”

<http://westallen.typepad.com/idealawg/2007/07/zen-and-the-art.html>

“Lawyers Turn To Meditation To Fight Stress And Improve Performance”

<http://barbarasymmons.com/2009/04/01/lawyers-turn-to-meditation-to-fight-stress-and-improve-performance/>

From the Michigan Bar Association, ***“Rest In Silence: Meditation for Lawyer.”***

www.michbar.org/journal/pdf/pdf4article1385.pdf

By the way, I've been to two meditation retreats for lawyers. They were great. So

was the food. They were sponsored by the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society and I got CLE credit for both retreats.

While I meditate by myself now, every teacher says it is better to do it in a group.