

Meditation for Lawyers

by

George J. Felos

A nineteenth century saint was once asked, “How can one realize God,” to which he replied, “One must think of the Lord incessantly, like a lawyer does with his cases.” Apparently, even the mystics understand how our minds become saturated with our legal work. Especially while litigating, I am amazed how my mind constantly percolates and churns the case facts, issues, witnesses, strategies, and so on. Truly incessant, my mind will offer its suggestions while I’m sleeping, eating, and in my last case, showering. I laughed upon realizing that I couldn’t even scrub without my mental voice presenting some new angle on a potential evidentiary dispute.

There’s nothing wrong with being mentally consumed with our work. The problem is turning down the mental volume and slowing our mental speed when our work does not demand this involvement. Unfortunately, overuse of our mental faculty often makes it difficult to relax the mind at the times we intend to unwind and enjoy a break from our work. We suffer the fate of the sorcerer’s apprentice. If you remember the movie *Fantasia*, Mickey Mouse disobediently uses his master’s magic to animate broomsticks to fill a vat with buckets of well-water, (the apprentice’s task), but when the job is completed, he can’t stop the magical workers from dumping more water and flooding the castle. A drowning Mickey is saved by the return of the sorcerer, who angrily utters the proper incantation to stop the spell. We have created these vast and useful intellects to do our bidding, yet without learning how to operate the shut-off switch, our willing servants can demonize us by preventing the relaxation, renewal, and inner peace that are necessary for our well-being.

Simply put, meditation is mind-control—you learning how to control your own mind. Control does not mean subjugation. The mind is obviously an essential tool. It serves us best when treated well, and like any servant, performs optimally and according to our wishes when it is respected and treated with kindness.

The process of meditation is simple. Sit comfortably in a quiet place with your spine erect, head straight, and eyes closed. Observe carefully the procession of thoughts and sensations. Notice what is passing through your awareness, without any need to alter your experience or change your thoughts or sensations. Let your awareness be unconnected to the objects of its attention. Keep your attention clear, yet relaxed. Your attention is like an adjustable lens of a camera. You can be under- or over-focused. Either way the result is a blur. Meditation is the same way. If insufficient energy is given to your attention, you tend to daydream or doze off. If too much effort is used, the process becomes strained and the mind becomes fatigued or agitated. Find the balance between slothfulness and trying too hard. A good meditation posture helps to maintain this balance.

Most meditation systems use a “focal point,” a place to return the attention to, when you become caught in the mind’s wanderings. The most common focal point is the sensation of the breath as it enters and exits the tip of the nostrils. As you are meditating focus your attention on this sensation of the breath. If a thought arises, watch it pass by. Sometimes though, one thought will trigger a chain of thought. You might think of a particular client, and before you know it, you’re mentally reviewing the causes of action for the pleading you will be drafting later that week. Your focal point enables you to pull yourself out of that daydream. It serves as a reminder to bring your attention back to the present—the sensation of the breath entering and exiting the nostrils. No matter how often your attention strays, gently but firmly bring your attention back to your focal point.

Different traditions use different focal points. Early Christian monks were fond of using the sensation of the abdomen rising and falling caused by diaphragmatic movement. Many Eastern traditions use “mantras,” which are repetitive sounds internally or externally chanted. Many Western monks intone the “Jesus prayer:” “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on my soul.” All of these focal points share a common principle—give the attention a home base, a place to rest and return to during the meditation process. Pick a focal point that appeals to you and stick with it.

While the process of meditation is simple, it is far from easy. If your unruly mind has been your master for your entire life, it’s not about to now compliantly surrender control. We lawyers think of ourselves as powerful and highly competent advocates, accomplishing remarkable things by the energy of our will and talent. If you hanker for a lesson in humility, try

meditating and see how your power of attention holds up against the errant movements of your mind. See how long you can focus on the sensation of the breath before your attention is diverted.

Understanding how the mind works facilitates meditation. The first principle of the mind is that, at any one moment, there is only one object of its attention. Because mental attention jumps so quickly from object to object, (three or four times per second, according to scientists), many mistakenly believe that the conscious mind is simultaneously occupied with numerous objects of attention. Let's say you are at a football game and you are cold and thirsty. You might say that you are watching the play on the field and are aware of your thirst and body temperature at the same time. But this is what really is occurring: the teams line up; a thought about what play will be called arises; a contraction in a back muscle captures your attention; the thought "I wish I brought my heavy jacket" arises; the ball is snapped; the thought, "He doesn't have time to get a pass off" arises; you feel a scratchy sensation in your throat; the mental image of the beer vendor crosses your mind; you experience a reaction of irritation because you remember that the vendor hasn't been seen this quarter; you see the pass thrown; you feel a thumping in your chest as the ball is in the air; etc.

In a second or two you have experienced multiple "mind moments," as I like to call them. They consist of either thoughts or sensations. And they happen so rapidly that we barely recognize them as individual entities. Meditation—the practice of awareness without judgment—slows down the mental procession. Easing mental rapidity allows you to see each "mind moment" as an individual entity. When this begins to occur, you may notice something else. Each thought or sensation has a beginning and an end and there is a space between each "mind moment." It's like being stopped at a railroad crossing and watching the passing freight train. When the train is whizzing by, the individual boxcars seem to blur together. Yet, if the train slows, you can begin to see each boxcar as a distinct object, and if the train is slowed sufficiently, you can see the space between each of the cars.

And what is there in the spaces between your thoughts and sensations? And for that matter, what are the benefits of meditation and who is it that is observing all that passes? That is for each of us to discover. Give it a try. Like any new endeavor, regular practice is essential. Select a quiet time and place where you won't be disturbed. Set aside twenty

minutes for meditation every day and do it for one month. The results may surprise you. Good luck!

Copyright, George J. Felos, 2001. George has practiced meditation for twenty-seven years and has given many meditation seminars and workshops. He will be offering Meditation for Lawyers as an approved Continuing Legal Education program in the near future. He practices law at Felos & Felos, P.A., 595 Main Street, Dunedin, Florida. He specializes in right-to-die cases; *In re guardianship of Browning*, 568 So.2d 4 (Fla. 1990). He is a Hospice patient volunteer and has served as Chair of the Board of Directors of the Hospice of the Florida Suncoast, the largest non-profit Hospice in the world. His non-fiction book, *Litigation as Spiritual Practice*, is currently on sale at www.litigationasspiritualpractice.com. To contact George, call (727) 736-1402.