



Mindful Lawyering Newsletter from the Mindfulness & Well-Being in Law
Committee of the New York City Bar Association

Issue No. 3 | Fall 2022

Welcome to the Mindfulness and Well-Being in Law Committee Newsletter!

About Us: We are a Committee of the New York City Bar Association and are here to serve the legal community in pursuit of balance. The Mindfulness & Well-Being in Law Committee provides programming, events, and resources to support member's wellness through the practice of mindfulness, including meditation, mindful movements, and other modalities that help bring one back to the present moment. Studies have found that mindfulness practices can assuage stress and anxiety, enhance emotional resilience, decrease implicit bias and reactivity, and increase creativity and productivity.

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Message from Chair, Lisa Podemski, Esq.

The Season for Rest

There is a great power in pressing pause, in not doing so to be more effective or productive, but for the value of true rest itself.

The clock has set back to winter mode, the daylight hours have shortened significantly, and the weather is cooling. If we listen to nature's cues and heed its message to rest more during the winter season, we may come back to ourselves and our true natures. As humans we are part of nature's ecosystem; though we often forget or ignore this or even try to actively fight its truth.

As farmers do, we can use winter to plant seeds for the future. In winter much farmland lies fallow. The goal of fallowing is to allow the land to rest and recover. Studies have shown that land fallowing is beneficial to soil quality, crop production and overall long-term sustainability. Just by doing nothing—trusting the process and becoming comfortable with the unknown.

The Danes have a word associated most with this time of year—hygge. Hygge is sourced from a sixteenth-century Norwegian term, hugga, meaning “to comfort” or “to console,” which is related to the English word “hug.”

The practice of intentional rest for its own sake contains within it the opportunities for a season of mindfulness. It allows us a period to observe things as they are, to notice the changes nature gifts us, and to try to practice sitting with what is.

The legal profession values productivity, however instead of fighting nature's cues to rest we can allow periods of hibernation from our busy lives and racing minds. Notice this and observe your mental, emotional and physical responses to this open invitation. This is a practice, and it requires practice—this season I offer an invitation to do just that. To allow yourself to rest, to notice what occurs, and to learn to gracefully respond to nature's lessons.



Thanks to our contributing members Ishani Dash, Katuska Moure, Lina Del Plato, Stacey L. Schaffer and Wendy Silva.

To submit comments, suggestions or your written work for consideration in future newsletters, email: mindfulness.citybar@gmail.com

CAPITAL "G" FOR THANKSGIVING by Stacy L. Schaffer, Esq.



Here we are in November with Thanksgiving upon us. I love Thanksgiving, because of course, PIE, but also, it marks the threshold to the holiday season and the New Year. We have lived for 11 months of the year, and it's time to take stock of what we are grateful for before we shower our loved ones with gifts and make plans and goals for the future.

For me, gratitude is an immensely important mindfulness practice. It can be habitual and easy for us to ruminate and worry over the bad things that happen, or that we feel are perpetrated on us, but gratitude, for me, is about being in the present. When I am really in tune with the energy of gratitude, it sharpens my awareness of now.

When we are grateful for something the feeling moves deeply into us, to our core, and gives us a sense of relief from the harsher realities: that we are vulnerable, that we are imperfect, that we need help, that we are indeed 'only' human.

Gratitude reminds us that we need each other and that we need to help each other; that life is not ultimately about ourselves, but about how we relate to the world and the people around us. Recall a time when you were truly grateful: maybe it was a time when you felt gratitude in the form of relief for a possible diagnosis that turned out to be nothing; maybe it was a time when that diagnosis was real and doctors treated you back to health again; maybe it was a time when another parent offered to pick up your child after daycare, because you had a work obligation and the laws of physics prevent you from physically being in two places at the same time. Whatever it is, a big thing, or a small gesture that fills you with gratitude, pay attention to how it impacts your being. Feel what gratitude does to your body and your mind, as it lifts your Spirit. That's how we achieve mindfulness, that's how we live now.

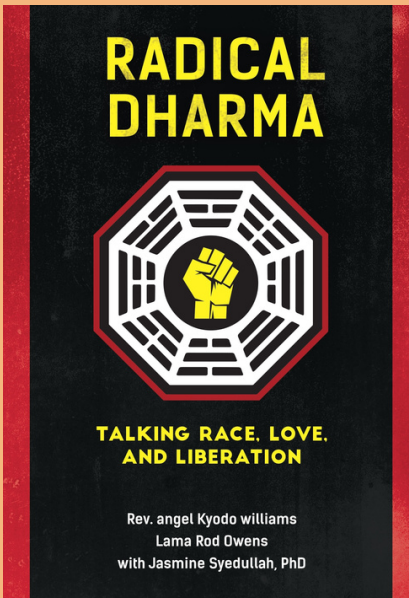
Ultimately, gratitude, like all good things, is an extension and an expression of love. Part of love is about giving of the self, and when we are grateful for someone or something, it is because they gave of themselves in a way that touched us or helped us. And part of love is the expression of deep emotion. When someone is truly grateful for something and gives expression to that in words or gestures of gratitude, they are similarly giving of themselves, and they are expressing a form of love.

We can also choose to reflect in the moment on things that we are grateful for in the past. To me this is a mindfulness practice because we are elevating our present moment awareness to feel what we have been grateful for in the past that makes us what we are today. For example, I am so grateful that my sons were born. I am grateful because the fact of their birth in the past gives rise to gratitude at this moment for their existence in my life now.

Over Thanksgiving this year, between the football games, the turkey, and the yummy, yummy pie, take a moment to really feel what it is to give thanks - to embody the feeling of giving and receiving gratitude. Commit to living a life of gratitude which not only means to thank others, but also means committing to act and behave in ways that will positively impact others. That's true power, and that's real love. That's gratitude with a capital "G" for Thanksgiving.

MWBL BOOKCLUB BOOK REIEW

by Isahni Dash, LLM.



Our September 2022 book club read was *Radical Dharma* by Rev. Angel Kyodo Williams, Lama Rod Owens and Jasmine Syedullah. The book begins with the three co-authors discussing their life experiences in separate essays in the section aptly titled 'Homeleaving.' The most difficult part of leaving home is remembering what we left. The authors show the readers how they struggled with finding a sangha, or a community, that they would call their own. This was especially hard in a "historically white-supremist, hetero-normative, and queer-phobic" world. They talk about their disappointments in the long journey endured in quest of spirituality and how they each ultimately found their footing in Buddhism. Each author bares their heart in telling their stories, and you can feel the pain and angst they go through while seeking freedom from marginalization.

As the chapters progress, the authors continue to offer raw and heartfelt insights, while explaining to readers how personal dharma is linked to social transformation. In one of the chapters, Owens beautifully describes 'What is Love,' stating that it transcends our need to control the recipient of love. In fact, all three authors – Rev. Williams, Owens and Syedullah, seek to transcend discrimination based on color, class, gender and sexuality in their approach to dharma. Owens essays how he grew up Christian due to his upbringing and struggled during his time at liberal arts college. He explains how he sought a community to heal his wounds and the many twists and turns in his life that led him to the path of dharma. Syedullah mentions her childhood in predominantly white spaces and how the desire to escape sadness and loneliness forged the way for her to find dharma practice. Rev. William's journey, on the other hand, was about difficult parental figures in her life, her feelings about growing up as a default Christian, and eventually, her vows to attain liberation. Through the experiences of its authors, the book talks about a new kind of dharma, radical dharma, which is more inclusive of all forms of diversity, at a time when our existence is threatened due to "socially embedded greed, hatred and ignorance."

At a certain point, around two-thirds into the book, it is possible to feel a little lost due to the convoluted structure – some of the points are made multiple times, and some are left a tad unsaid. Just when you might lose hope and put the book down, the essays once again grab your attention by touching on the aspect of liberation and what it looks like. The authors envision a new America and provide helpful tips on how we may implement the skills we learn in our practice. Owens understands radical presence as practicing staying authentic to one's true self and being present towards others' feelings. Rev. Williams' examples on accomplishing awareness also stand out as relevant and easy to follow practices.

While *Radical Dharma* may be a difficult book to read in terms of content, structure and format, it does leave a patient reader with words of wisdom that are dropped across its pages. All three authors have very different styles of writing, so a better editing could have helped make this book a bit more palatable. However, if you can go past the format, you would be glad to have read the book. The authors appeal directly to our hearts to be more compassionate, to be comfortable sitting with discomfort, and to love each-other more deeply. This book was long overdue.

Some notable quotes:

“As Bruce Lee famously said, “Under duress, we do not rise to our expectations, but fall to our level of training.” Hundreds of years of living in a context designed by pillagers of the land and captors of people—without sufficient intervention—naturally establishes the curriculum of the training to which we fall.”

“It is not enough to know we want freedom. We have to practice it. We have to be able to live it out together.”

“Intersectionality is its own ideal.”

Some extracts from the glossary:

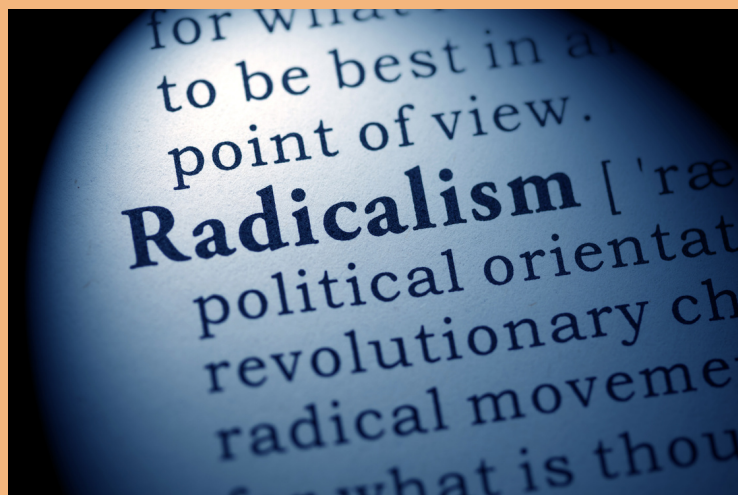
Black liberation movement: Refers to specific movements in the United States that have focused on addressing the oppression of Black folks, including the civil rights movement, the Black Power movement, and the current Black Lives Matter movement.

Bodhisattva: A Sanskrit word that translates literally to “awake being.” A Spiritual Warrior in Buddhism, it is like a saint who vows to achieve enlightenment only to free others. Many Buddhists take the Bodhisattva Vow in which they commit to spiritual enlightenment in this life and all lives to come in order to liberate others.

Dharma/dharma: A Sanskrit word that has several meanings. The teachings of the Buddha usually appear as “the Dharma;” more generally, and in lowercase, it refers to “truth,” “the law,” or one’s path in life. It is also a way to describe how things really are or the truth of reality. In this case, it is sometimes anglicized as Truth and appears as “Dharma.”

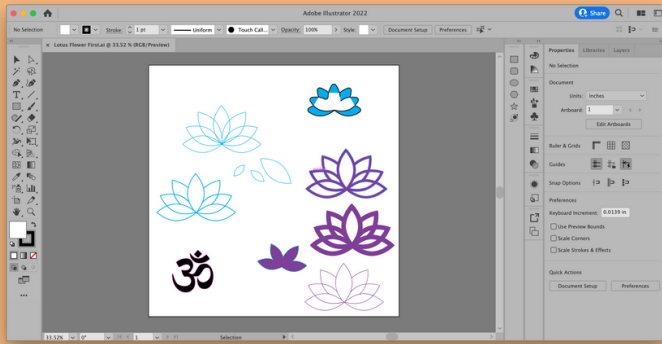
Lovingkindness meditation: Often called metta practice in Theravada traditions, it is the practice of deepening love and compassion for self and learning to extend love and compassion to others.

Sangha: Traditionally meaning the monastic community of Buddhist practitioners, now more contemporarily understood to be the community or congregation of Buddhist practitioners lay and ordained.



Crafting Mindfulness - From Ellipse to Lotus Flower

by Lina Del Plato, Esq.



Mindfulness can be found in many ways and in our everyday lives. Not everyone can or wants to practice yoga or meditation, but there is always something that can relax and focus us. The point is to find what works for you. A ritual of self-care reduces the rate of burn out from our work and allows us to be better attorneys and legal advocates.

While by day, I represent children involved in the Family Court system, I am a graphic designer and maker in the evenings and on weekends. For some time, I have wanted to design a lotus flower. I had the thought in my head for months, but I really could not figure out how to create it. I finally sat down one night and just looked at lotus flower images. I began to notice the pattern and then the shape. The shape I noticed is called an ellipse - an extended circle. First, I drew an ellipse in Adobe Illustrator, then elongated that shape to a leaf and replicated it several times. I then modified and manipulated that into the final product, a lotus flower.

The whole process took several nights to finalize the design, modifying it many times to ensure that it was not too thin to be cut by my vinyl cutting machine. In the left picture above, you will see the beginning process: the leaf, the replication, and the almost final product. The picture to the right shows the final design on a t-shirt. I decided that the first product I would use this image on would be a tumbler for my water, as a reminder to breathe and hydrate as an another effort in my self care.

For me, the entire design and product making process is in itself a mindfulness practice. I invite you to do the following: take a walk and just look around - whether you see a flower or a couch, now find the shapes in the items that you see. Is it a circle or a square or is it several shapes combined into one final image? The relaxed observation of shapes is the first step in drawing and design and is a way to be present and mindful although it is not the first thing that we think of when we begin to practice mindfulness. While you may be distracted by what you see, when the attention is gone, seek to return to the shape (and breath). So grab that paper and pencil or that computer or iPad, and start designing or coloring, and make some time for yourself!



MINDFUL MOMENT: THE ART OF WAITING

by Katuska Moure, LL.M.

Leonardo Da Vinci began his painting of the Mona Lisa in 1519, working on it intermittently over several years. It was still in his studio when he died 16 years later. Antoni Gaudi started the construction of the famous church "La Sagrada Familia" in Barcelona but was never able to see it completed. While waiting, could we not appreciate the beauty of a work of art? Can we imagine what the Mona Lisa would look like if it was rushed?



We can all agree that there is wisdom in waiting and watching something unfold – the unveiling of a portrait, a toddler crawling and then walking, or a seed germinating and bearing fruit after months or even years. Indeed, sometimes waiting is the only thing we can do. Can you recall your days eagerly waiting for bar exam results and where it seemed that it was the only thing we could do? While waiting is not something most people enjoy doing, – yet, daily we wait in traffic, at appointments, in shopping lines, and for our food to heat in the microwave. Since it is a such a regular part of our lives, should we not try to learn the art of waiting with the wisdom of mindfulness?

Next time you are waiting, or more likely rushing somewhere to then wait, make it a mindful moment. Take a breath, absorb your surroundings, and enjoy the moment. People say that “good things come to those who wait” and so we can hope that is the case. We can use waiting as an opportunity to explore our capacity for patience. We can notice what having our plans thwarted stirs up inside of us, the rippling effects through our body, and the frustration growing in our heart. We can pause and consciously explore the sensations in our body and heart, and if possible, appreciate those moments.

Creation of uncertainty may be the biggest problem most of us have with waiting. Even when we ‘expect’ a wait, it still triggers a mild fight inside us. The uncertainty of the length of the wait triggers feelings of impatience, anxiety and sometimes even anger. What can be done when we feel this way?

Despite our impatience with waiting, we should train our mind to understand that this need not signal a waste of time. On the contrary, the secret to self-control, contentment in life, and achieving any level of success is embracing the “wait”. Patience can also be a form of action; thus, instead of training your mind to mindlessly look for distractions, try to cultivate awareness of your surroundings while waiting by:

1. exploring your capacity for patience and increasing your composure in the midst of uncertainty;
2. increasing appreciation for moments of stillness and noticing your body soften as you lean into the quiet;
3. enhancing creativity; and
4. developing strength of mind, focus and attention.

Waiting wisely with mindfulness is about employing mindfulness while waiting thereby, heightening our awareness of anxiety, tension and irritation in the body, and reaching the point of acceptance of the wait.

Will you try Mindful Waiting next time you are in a queue or in the traffic? I know I will. After all, Mindful Waiting is the way to inculcate a good habit that can only be positive in the situation.

Resources

- <https://www.mindful.org/the-wisdom-of-waiting/>
- <https://serenityinsuffering.com/waiting-wisely-with-mindfulness/>



MEDITATION ON GRIEF

by Wendy Silva, Esq.

Recently when learning about the death of a friend's mother, I heard someone tell my friend, "You will move on." This was meant as a heartfelt message of lending comfort to my friend letting her know that she would not always feel pain. I thought, however, that a better response might have been "You will get through this." Grief doesn't occur in a vacuum. After losing a loved one, any number of emotions including shock, pain, anger, denial, frustration, confusion, numbness, relief and even laughter can surface. It may be difficult, but it is not permanent. It is supposed to be messy.

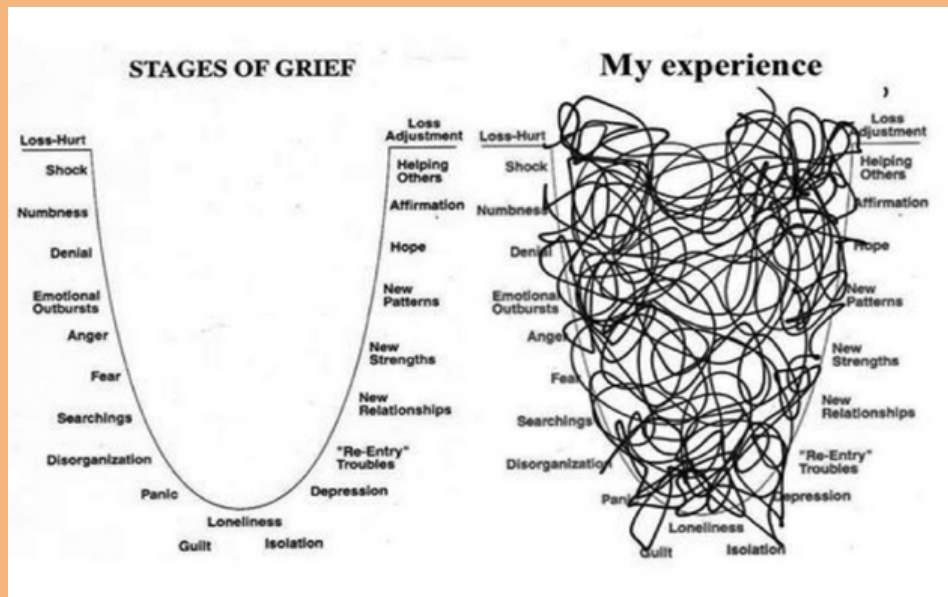


Illustration credit:
wecandiebetter.com

These past few years have indeed taken a toll on so many. In these unprecedented times, our usual ways of coping with loss have been challenged. Insurmountable losses from Covid-19, and natural or other causes, have interrupted our socialized rituals of grief. The grieving process has been prolonged by the inability to properly say goodbye or give respect to a departed loved one, changing the way we normalize closure in our society.

Grief, however, is not confined to the loss of a loved one. The loss of a job; a divorce; the end of a friendship due to physical separation or value differences all generate emotional and biological changes that need to be processed in ways similar to the death of a loved one. The brain needs time to understand and work through the loss. Whatever the loss may be for you personally, a grieving process must nonetheless be allowed.

Having dealt with personal losses over the years and learning about grief through my work on family cases and estate matters, I have learned a valuable lesson. That is, it is only by allowing grief to pass through, in natural stages - no matter how long the stage may last- until space surrounds it, can true healing occur. Pain may be gradual, but it is a necessary instrument of change. Traumatic events are a threat to our survival and bring about emotions that are transmitters of information on how to best move forward. There is no right or wrong way to grieve, however, tapping into a "survival kit" of sorts can help you get through the difficult moments.

Emotions are like water, if you hold them like a dam, it can cause incomprehensible damage. For ways to work through the process, consider implementing:

- **Rest** - not to be underestimated, but be cognizant of signs of slipping into deep depression or social isolation.
- **Talk** - find a person to talk to beyond your immediate circle of friends and family to open up about your emotions.
- **Self-compassion** - practice forgiving yourself for anything you may feel you could have done differently.
- **Journal** - use the wisdom of a pen to allow a space and a place to name what is too difficult to speak.
- **Prepare** - know that there will be moments of discomfort or triggers/reminders of the loss. Prepare in advance to deal with these moments.
- **Engage** - continue with normal behavior while recognizing that busyness may be a way of suppressing any of the stages of grief.
- **Practice gratitude** - recognize the extraordinariness of life and positive aspects of the experience/value of the person/event you had the honor to have in your life. Use a practice of meditation on "gratitude" or "lovingkindness".
- **Honor** - be true to yourself about the feelings of the loss of the relationship, whatever they may be. The feeling is yours alone. Avoid getting stuck on a storyline.
- **Get physical** - moving your body reduces cortisol and brings together the mind/body connection and clearer thinking.
- **Boundaries** - establish boundaries to care for yourself.
- **Get help** - seek professional help to understand how your story may be prolonging your grief.
- **Recognize** - recognize that passing through grief does not mean forgetting the relationship.
- **Survive** - live so that you may continue to experience the extraordinariness of what it means to have had someone or something important in your life. Breathe that in and breathe that out.

Finally, if someone close to you has experienced a loss, recognize the most important thing that you can do for them is to "be present"- listen more than talk; don't feel the need to "fix" the person grieving; allow discomfort and refrain from relating your own losses and inadvertently diminishing theirs.

To all those experiencing a loss, reflect on this: "you will be sad and hurt but you will be ok, even if you don't know it now."

Click below for valuable sources of support:

- <https://copefoundation.org/>
- <https://www.helpguide.org/>





UPCOMING MWBL EVENTS

Click on links below to join

MWBL Bookclub

November 15, 2022 [Peak Mind](#) by Amishi Jha

Mindfulness Breaks and Yoga for Lawyers

December 7, 2022 [Yoga for Lawyers with Equinox](#) at 1:30pm

December 9, 2022 [Mindfulness Break](#) at 1:15pm

December 15, 2022 [Yoga for Lawyers](#) at 7:00pm

Listen to our Mindful Lawyering Podcast

[Episode 2](#)

with Aimee Latorre, Lisa Podemski & Tsui Yee
discussing setting healthy boundaries at work

Watch a Replay of:

[Unlocking The Power of Sleep to Thrive in Work and Life](#)
with Dr. Jagdeep Bijwadia and Kendra Brodin, Esq., MSW

SAVE THE DATE

February 16, 2023 Wellness Fair - Registration Info to Come

Interested in joining our Committee?

Visit our [MWBL Committee page](#)

for more info and resources