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WELLNESS FOR ATTORNEYS

TRENDING TOPICS IN JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM & PRACTICE 2020

September 2, 2020, 10 a.m.

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GOALS

- Understand why taking care of yourself is especially important when dealing with stressful, confrontational, and emotional cases ... and for everyone during COVID-19.
- Explore the benefits of mindfulness, meditation, breathwork, Yoga, exercise, living with gratitude and compassion, and positive psychology.
- Learn exercises you can incorporate into your daily life and law practice.

ATTRIBUTION

Many of the concepts in this presentation, and the way and order in which they are explained, come from two sources, my Yoga teachers:

- Sam Chase, Yoga & the Pursuit of Happiness
- Jessica and Alvin Noche, Kramas Yoga Teacher Training

During Yoga teacher training, I made an outline, law school-style from these two sources. What is below is a version of that outline, with very broad explanations of some very deep concepts. Anyone interested in learning more about these concepts should read Sam Chase's book. It is my absolute favorite book about Yoga and meditation. More books to read are listed at the end of this handout.

WHAT WE ARE BATTLING

- **The evolution of the human brain**
 - Reptilian brain – the oldest part of the brain, it includes structures for instinctive and automatic survival behaviors.
 - Limbic brain – this part came next. Common to most mammals, it contains the structures for emotions and long-term memories.
 - Neocortex – the most recent and most human part of the brain. It contains key structures for activities like conscious thought, future planning, and reasoning.

- **The psychological biases of the human mind**
 - The most important for us, for attorney wellness – Negativity bias
 - “Our brains are hardwired to pay more attention to bad things than good things. This is a deeply ingrained survival tactic and evolutionary adaptation. It keeps us primed to avoid perceived threats, but it also leaves us with a tendency to err on the side of perceiving a threat whether or not one actually exists.” Sam Chase.

- **The unreasonable expectations of modern American life, stress, and CORTISOL**
 - Cortisol is your body's main stress hormone. It fuels your body's “fight or flight” response. Too much of it causes inflammation and destruction of your tissues (for example, your heart tissues), it increases your blood pressure, it disrupts your sleep/wake cycle, it causes lethargy and headaches, it affects memory and concentration, and it will shut down what it perceives to be unnecessary bodily functions in its “fight or flight” response such as the immune system, the digestive system (think weight gain), the reproductive system, and even growth processes.

TECHNIQUES FOR WELLNESS

- **Mindfulness**

- Mindfulness is the practice of being fully present in the moment.
- Not worrying about the past or guessing at the future.
- Not being reactive, but proactive and disciplined in your mind.
- It is a key tenet of Yoga and many other disciplines concerned with happiness and well-being.
- “Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate.” Carl Jung, psychologist.
- Exercise: come into this moment together, even by Zoom. Take this one hour to just sit and listen and be open-minded. Don’t check your email.

- **Breathwork**

- Pranayama = breathwork
- Prana (or chi) = the universal life force
 - Prana is my favorite concept in Yoga. It is the universal life force, also referred to as “chi” in other disciplines, or “the force” of the Jedis in the Star Wars universe, or Eywa in the movie, Avatar.
- When you focus on a single cycle of inhaling and exhaling, you come into the present moment.
 - It calms and soothes the nervous system and draws attention inward, to your body in the present moment. It slows down your heart rate, it calms the mind and releases important chemicals to combat cortisol, and it feels so good. It is meditative. It feels like a soft vibrating massage of my nerves, my physical pain, my sinuses, my physical brain, and my mind.
- Exercise: Four-Part Box Breath
 - Observe the unconscious part of your brain making you breath. Then take an intentional breath. In those two breaths, you are using different parts of your brain to breath: the reptilian brain kept you breathing while you were not thinking about it, and then your neocortex took that intentional breath.
 - Four-count inhale, hold for four count, four-count exhale, hold for four counts. All through the nose.

- **Meditation**

- Now mediation is taking control of the mind in the same way as with the breath in Pranayama.
- Meditation is not the absence of thought. Meditation is the act of pulling your mind back to the present moment, to your breath, to your stillness, and just being there. Just running the machine. Keeping pulling it back. No matter how many times it strays.
- Puppy analogy
 - We tell stories to ourselves in our minds all the time.
 - Think of your mind as a puppy, always sniffing around and constantly chewing on things and wanting to play.

- Train the puppy.
 - In meditation and mindfulness, if your mind strays, return it firmly but gently and without judgment or anger.
- Strengthen your mind, just like you strengthen your body. Gain better control of your inner environment, even in the most challenging of times.
 - Meditation does for your mind what yoga poses, or asanas, do for the body. With practice, the mind becomes stronger, more flexible, focused, and clear. It evolves into a kinder place to live.
- Mindfulness is a light meditation throughout your day, every day, every minute.
- Why meditate?
 - The science: neuroscience and positive psychology
 - Practice meditation for calmness and non-reactivity, to create positive muscle memory in the connections in your brain
 - Just like physical muscle memory in dance and sports and everyday life
 - Lengthen your reaction time
 - Change your reaction
 - Change the way you see things
- My favorite types of meditation
 - Loving-kindness or Metta meditation
 - Object/visualization, concentrative (give the mind one thing to focus on, e.g., the breath, the space between breaths, any chosen object or idea but one that is less stimulating, and teach the mind to stay put)
 - Good for beginners
 - Example: guided mountain meditation
 - Japa meditation (say a mantra 108 times using mala beads)
 - Gratitude meditation
 - Yoga as a moving meditation
- Apps for meditation and breathwork
 - Calm
 - Insight Timer
- We will do a short example of loving-kindness Metta meditation at the end of this session.

May I be safe.
 May I be happy.
 May I be healthy.
 May I be at peace.

May you be safe.
 May you be happy
 May you be healthy.
 May you be at peace.

- **Yoga**

- Put all of this together, with exercise, and you have Yoga.
- Yoga is not a religion. It is not concerned with defining a god or gods. It is much more Earthbound than that. Yoga is an ancient system of health care for the mind, body, and spirit. It influences how we see and respond to reality. It offers a path to feeling whole and alive and happy, in whatever form that may take for each of us.
- The intention of Yoga is “to still the fluctuations of the mind.”
- There are eight limbs of Yoga. The physical practice you see in the West is just one limb.
- From my teacher training final exam, what is Yoga?:

The most obvious benefit of Yoga is strengthening your body and making it more flexible and durable. The subtler, parallel benefit of Yoga is strengthening your mind and making it more flexible, adaptive, and resilient. The body and the mind become more spacious and still. You take control of every molecule of your body and your mind. It is a glorious feeling, when it all comes together like that.

As part of an exercise regime, Yoga can definitely help keep you long and lean and healthy. It increases bone density, provides physical therapy for a variety of painful conditions, builds lung capacity, reduces harmful cortisol, boosts the digestive and immunity systems, and lowers blood pressure. Flexibility is an obvious benefit, but with that flexibility comes better adaption and avoidance and mitigation of injury.

But for me, the more fascinating benefits of Yoga are subtle. As part of a daily lifestyle, practicing all eight limbs of Yoga can change your mind’s wiring, your way of responding to the world, and your entire life. It changes your sight. It changes your reactions and reaction time. It makes you more grateful and compassionate. It shows you how to be happy and content.

- **Live with gratitude**

- Santosha
- Contentment
- Happiness is an inside job.
- Happier people do not have easier lives, with less hard work and trauma. They are simply more grateful of what they have and choose to be conscious of their contentment more often.
- Neuroscience and positive psychology studies have shown that writing down 5 things you are grateful for, big or small, once a week for 10 weeks can physically rewire connections in your brain to lessen the negativity bias in your mind.

- **Live with compassion and non-judgment**

- Ahimsa
- Do good and be kind. Or at least do no harm.

- There are selfish benefits to compassion: helping others has been shown to elevate your mood and make you happier. Scientific studies, the Dalai Lama, and the Mayo Clinic agree.
- “When we feel love and kindness toward others, it not only makes others feel loved and cared for, but it helps us also to develop inner happiness and peace.” Dalai Lama.
- “Compassion is your ability to experience others' feelings – from joy to sorrow – with a desire to help. Not only does compassion decrease suffering by helping those in need, but also it can boost your bond with others. Plus, you may find that the pursuit of compassion makes you happier than the pursuit of happiness.” Mayo Clinic, Dr. Amit Sood.
- **Choose carefully how to share your energy and time**
 - As a form of self-discipline, concentration, minimalism, and self-care, Marie Kondo your life, your commitments, and your calendar.
 - Your time and energy are your most precious resources. Spend them wisely.
 - Exercise: list the things that make you the happiest. List your current commitments and activities. How well do they line up?
- **Exercise**
 - Of course you want to be in shape and have your body feel and look good in daily life.
 - But exercise can also be a form of meditation, depending on the type of exercise and how you do it.
 - It can also be a way to connect with others and Nature.
 - But the science! Be strategic with your neurochemistry:
 - When you exercise, your body releases chemicals called endorphins. Endorphins are natural painkillers and mood elevators.
 - Physical activity also stimulates the release of dopamine and serotonin. These brain chemicals play an important part in regulating your mood. Exercise has also been shown to increase serotonin levels in your brain.
- **Your diet**
 - Eat healthy and whole, of course. Use the Michael Pollan rule: eat foods with five or less ingredients, all of which you can pronounce, and as many uncooked plants as possible.
 - But realize this, too (famous Yoga quote/meme from unknown source):

“Your diet is not only what you eat.
 It is what you watch,
 What you listen to,
 What you read,
 The people you hang around.
 Be mindful of the things
 You put into your body,

Emotionally,
Spiritually,
And physically.”

- **Take breaks**
 - The 20-20-20 rule: look away from your computer screen every 20 minutes or so and look at something around 20 feet away for about 20 seconds. I find this very difficult to implement.
 - Instead, my version: I try to stand up, move around, stretch my body especially my shoulders and chest, and rest my eyes for about five minutes every hour.

- **Take vacations from work and screens**
 - Take a vacation and mean it. Do not check email and voice mail, if at all possible. It can be done.
 - Take periodic breaks from social media.

- **Don't multi-task**
 - Multi-tasking is bad for your mind and mindfulness. It has been proven to make us worse at all the tasks we are doing, it causes stress, and we are slower.
 - Focus the mind on one task at a time. Do it well. Finish it. Then move on.
 - Cultivate the skill of concentration.
 - Example from Sam Chase: you are lost driving. To focus, you turn down the music, take off your sunglasses, and squint to sharpen your sight. You focus your attention toward one crucial task: becoming un-lost.

- **Be aware of your body's alignment while you work**
 - Do a body scan every so often.
 - Start at the Earth and build your alignment up, just like in a Yoga pose.
 - Feet firmly and flat on the floor
 - Knees bent at 90 degrees
 - Belly engaged, ribs tucked down towards hip bones
 - Hips relaxed
 - Chest open
 - Shoulders back and down and at ease
 - Elbows at 90 degrees
 - Wrists and fingers relaxed
 - Roll your neck gently in all directions
 - Reach the crown of your head up
 - Slightly tuck your chin
 - Face relaxed
 - Release your jaw
 - Release your tongue, stick out your tongue
 - Blink your eyes, roll your eyes
 - Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth
 - Reset complete. Now get back to work!

- **Music and smells**
 - Try playing calm, low-key instrumental music in the background of your work environment. Instrumental music infused with sounds of Nature is my favorite, e.g., rain, any water, whales, crickets, etc. Pandora has nice channels with this type of music. My favorite for the office and for the Yoga classes I teach are Hammock and Max Richter.
 - I would not be a Yoga teacher if I didn't advocate for essentials oils and diffusers. The sense of smell can contribute greatly to a feeling of calm. The olfactory system is located in the same part of our brain that affects emotions, memory, and creativity. Lavender, eucalyptus, mint, and other essential oils have been proven to promote feelings of calmness.
 - People at my firm joke that my office feels like a spa. My house does, too!

- **Nature**
 - Get outside! Go for a walk. Take deep breaths of fresh air. Look at trees. Really notice them. Look at the sky and the stars. Feel the wind and sun on your skin.
 - The health benefits of this technique for wellness are numerous and we've all heard them before, especially during COVID-19. We need Vitamin D for our bones, blood cells, and immune system. Getting outside has been proven to reduce anxiety. It increases serotonin. It helps regulate your sleep/wake schedule. It improves focus and is used as a therapy for children with ADHD. It is thought to boost creativity and help reset your thought patterns.

- **Minimalism and cleanliness**
 - Saucha
 - Marie Kondo!
 - Keep your home, office, and body clean. Outer order contributes to inner calm.
 - Declutter your house, your office, your commitments, and the junky thoughts in your mind.
 - Pack light, be light, be more adaptable.

- **Sleep**
 - Last but certainly not least. I think one of the most important things to do right now for me, during COVID-19 and other periods of intense stress, is to sleep!
 - Studies have shown that getting the proper amount of sleep every day – 7 to 8 hours – can be one of the single most important things to do for wellness.
 - Sleep lets your brain and mind rest, so that your learning, concentration, and memory functions can operate properly the next day.
 - Sleep helps you process emotions and presses reset on a bad day. Poor sleep is strongly linked to depression.
 - Your blood pressure goes down during sleeping, which gives your heart and cardiovascular system a break, helping fight heart disease and risk of stroke.

- Your immune system loves the chance to scan your body during sleep and see where it is needed, while other systems relax.
- Poor sleep is linked to higher body fat, type 2 diabetes risk, and inflammation.
- Sleep allows your muscles to relax, repair, and rebuild.
- Human Growth Hormone is mostly produced while asleep. HGH is responsible for repairing all sorts of tissues. It is also linked to better athletic performance.
- Set an alarm for when to go to bed and abide by it. If you don't have time for 7 to 8 hours of sleep per night, adjust your commitments.
- If you have trouble sleeping, try doing some of the techniques above during the day and then try Yoga Nidra at night.
 - Yoga Nidra is a type of meditation you can do at night before bed, laying flat on your back in Savasana Pose (Corpse Pose). It is said to slow the wavelengths in your mind and help you enter a sleep-like state. It is a guided meditation that usually starts with a detailed scan of your body, while breathing mindfully and slowly to trigger relaxation in your systems.
 - You can find many Yoga Nidra meditations online and on different apps.

RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

- Yoga and the Pursuit of Happiness, Sam Chase
- The Art of Happiness, the Dalai Llama
- The Book of Joy, the Dalai Llama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu
- Harvard Medical School Guide to Yoga, Marlynn Wei and James Groves
- The Science of Yoga, William Broad
- Buddha's Brain, Rick Hanson
- Emotional Life of Your Brain, Richard Davidson
- Altered Traits, David Goleman and Richard Davidson
- Do Your Om Thing, Rebecca Pacheco
- Yoga and the Path of the Urban Mystic, Darren Main
- Perfectly Imperfect, Baron Baptiste
- Light on Life, B.K.S. Iyengar