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Neutral's Spiritual Perspective Infuses His Work

By Evan George
Daily Journal Staff Writer

When Maurice J. Attie says he has been mediating disputes since before he can remember, he means it.

"When did I start? Many lives ago is the real answer," said Attie, a litigator-turned-dispute-resolution-guru, who became a full-time neutral in 2002.

ADR Profile

Before that, he spent several years lecturing about alternatives to conventional law. He sees an underlying spiritual side to mediation, ruled as much by the law of karma as that of California, he said.

"Legal issues can be approached from the inside out, rather than outside in," Attie said.

"Most people who have legal issues believe that there's this side and that side," he added. "But from a spiritual point of view, there aren't any sides."

He said compassion and sensitivity to interpersonal issues inform his work as a neutral.

Lawyers who have used his services say the unusual approach yields success in settling the dispute at hand, sometimes even in healing the rift between warring parties.

In December, Attie, 67, joined First Resolution Services, a boutique firm with offices throughout Los Angeles County, as one of just six attorney mediators in the judge-driven company.

Holly Friedman, who founded the firm in 2006, personally sought him out.

"He is very unique," Friedman said. "He really cares about settling, he puts in extra time without any extra charge and he really engages the parties to become part of the process," she added.



ROBERT LEVINS / Daily Journal

"Legal issues can be approached from the inside out. Most people who have legal issues believe that there's this side and that side. But from a spiritual point of view, there aren't any sides," neutral Maurice J. Attie said.

Although Attie is a firm believer in the mediation process, reaching that point has been a long, strange journey.

He graduated in 1965 from the University of California, Los Angeles School of Law, intent on becoming an accountant-attorney and real estate broker. He joined the Los Angeles city attorney's office as an eminent-domain lawyer, but after five years, he realized that real estate was not his life's work.

Then, after "what you'd call a spiritual calling," he said, he picked up and moved to Israel.

There, he passed the bar, which required a mandatory one-year unpaid clerkship, and practiced for nine months before returning to

Los Angeles.

Attie found work as a litigator for a now-defunct entertainment firm before becoming a nonequity partner at Trope and Trope, where he worked for three years. During that time, he also was studying yoga with a spiritual teacher, he said, and kept looking for ways to apply Eastern philosophy to the legal profession.

By the early 1990s, Attie had found it.

He parlayed his sharp legal knowledge and spiritual view of the world into a gig as a law lecturer on the alternative lifestyle circuit. Between 1993 and 1999, he traveled the West Coast and Europe, lecturing on alternatives to conventional

law, including dispute resolution techniques, mostly at conferences geared toward a New Age-minded audience.

Attie even began writing a book on his technique, which he called ReCreation, a part-spiritual counseling, part-legal mediation. Although he received good responses from his lectures, the methods resulted in few cases, he said.

"There were few clients who were good candidates for it, because few people are willing to recognize that they have a role in the problem they think is caused by some other person," Attie said.

To some, however, the approach made sense.

Spiritual Perspective Infuses Work

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One was a woman who had been rear-ended in her car three times in three years, all on the same date. She came to Attie for help after seeing him speak at a Whole Life Expo.

"I said, 'You can wait until the next anniversary and have another accident, or you could do some of the inner work and see if we can stop that energy from happening,'" Attie recalled. "We did some sessions together. She stopped having accidents, and we resolved all the disputes favorably."

Still, fewer than a dozen clients were open to that kind of mediation, Attie said.

To merge his efforts with court-sponsored mediation, Attie began an ongoing education, taking 200 hours of various mediation-training courses. He mentors new neutrals and sits on nearly every mediation panel at the Los Angeles County Superior Court, handling all types of cases.

Rather than inject his alternative approach, Attie said, he lets his spiritual point of view inform mediation proceedings, even if clients can't tell.

"My ReCreation language does not show up," he said. "While it's part of my cognition, mostly I'm functioning off my intuition."

Attorneys who have used Attie's services say that his intuition has helped them settle cases more easily than they expected.

"There were some pretty high



Maurice J. Attie

Affiliation: First Resolution Services

Specialty: General litigation, Contracts, Real Estate

Rate: \$400 per hour;
\$4,000 per case

Location: Westwood

Age: 67

emotions in the one he handled for us," Douglas T. Witta, of Norminton & Witta in Beverly Hills said. "But he got the thing settled, which surprised me."

Coby R. Halavais, who represents hard moneylenders at Halavais and Associates in Lake Forest, said he

seeks out Attie for difficult cases.

"My clients are typically in the higher-end markets, so I've really been surprised at his ability to cool the tempers in the room and get people to hold hands and sing 'Kumbaya,'" said Halavais, who has used Attie five times.

He said Attie's strength is getting both parties to vent and to work through the personal issues involved. Most of all, Attie helps them to believe as much as he does in the power of alternative dispute resolution, Halavais said.

"He tells them, 'This is your chance to take control,'" Halavais said.

It is more than good legal advice, Attie said. It has a healing power.

Here are some attorneys who have used Attie's services.

Douglas P. Witta, Norminton & Witta, Beverly Hills; Meredith Lobel-Angel, Law Offices of Frank P. Angel, Santa Monica; Frank N. Lee, Los Angeles; Coby R. Halavais, Halavais and Associates, Lake Forest; Robert J. Reamer, Hawthorne; John Jackman, David M. Shaby & Associates, Culver City; Dean A. Olson, Morris Polich & Purdy, Los Angeles; Roy C. Dickson, Dickson & Associates, Yorba Linda; Howard M. Knee, Knee, Ross & Silverman, Los Angeles; Tamara Benefield, Beverly Hills