



## Meditations on Intention and Being: Daily Reflections on the Path of Yoga, Mindfulness, and Compassion (An Anchor Books Original)

By Rolf Gates

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Yoga has never been more popular. Throughout the United States, people are turning to this ancient practice as a response to the pressures of today's hectic world.

In *Meditations on Intention and Being*, acclaimed yoga teacher Rolf Gates draws on twenty years of teaching experience to explore and explain how to take the mindfulness of yoga off the mat and integrate it into every aspect of life.

Presented in the form of 365 inspirational daily reflections, Gates helps readers—from experienced yogis to novices seeking a little tranquility—to fundamentally reconsider their relationships with their minds, bodies, and the universe around them through self-reflection. Over the course of seven chapters, he explores Effortlessness, Nonviolence, The Spirit of Practice, Mindfulness, Compassion and Loving-kindness, Equanimity and Joy, and Intention and Being, giving readers the tools they need to effect positive changes in their lives.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

“An absolute gift. Rolf is able to take profound teachings and make them both personal and accessible. It’s like having a wise, compassionate friend in your ear, guiding you toward your own well-being.”

—Gabrielle Bernstein, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Miracles Now*

“Rolf Gates offers a deeply personal, and universally applicable, study of the core practices that are embedded in the ancient systems of yoga and Buddhism, with a wholly unique perspective and voice for the contemporary age.”

—David Lipsius, CEO, Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health

“Gates reveals himself as a teacher whose intimacy, honesty, and larger intention to live and love well bring forth jewels of wisdom in this precious collection.”

—Shiva Rea, creator, Prana Vinyasa, author of *Tending the Heart Fire: Living in Flow with the Pulse of Life*

“Rolf presents his wealth of yoga knowledge and his life experiences in such a way that you feel encouraged to follow suit. He combines the more complex teachings of Buddha with specific examples that guide the reader through very meaningful and accessible chapters. Not only does he talk the talk—he walks the walk, too.”

—Kathryn Budig, yoga teacher and author of *Aim True*

“*Meditations on Intention and Being* is a wonderful balance between personal story and traditional Eastern philosophy, and offers an inspirational and informed perspective on the place of yoga, mindfulness, and compassion in our everyday lives.”

—Beryl Bender Birch, author of *Power Yoga* and *Yoga for Warriors*

“Rolf has done it again. These reflections are so down to earth and practical that you relax just reading them. If you are interested in living your life from the inside out, this is the book you want to start your day with.”

—Congressman Tim Ryan, author of *A Mindful Nation: How a Simple Practice Can Help Us Reduce Stress, Improve Performance and Recapture the American Spirit*

“Inspiring and accessible. Rolf’s intimate writing about his own life journey demonstrates to the reader how to apply the key teachings from yoga and mindfulness in every day life.”

—Phillip Moffitt, author of *Dancing with Life* and *Emotional Chaos to Clarity*

“Gates’ searching meditations on life’s pains and imperfections, and the huge challenges we face in meeting those pains with compassion, are among the most eloquent I have read in modern yoga literature.”

—Rob Schware, executive director, the Give Back Yoga Foundation; president, the Yoga Service Council

“Filled with beautifully polished reflections of life and ancient wisdom teachings. Rolf’s personal honesty and ability to craft a lush story make page after page a brilliant, insightful gift.”

—R. Nikki Myers, founder Y12SR (The Yoga of 12-Step Recovery)

“*Meditations on Intention and Being* whispers us through a heartfelt journey into both inward and outward dimensions. This book challenges the reader, but more importantly, supports and instills hope. I recommend

it for anyone seeking to live a better, more fulfilling life.”

—Matthew Sanford, president-CEO, Mind Body Solutions; author of *Waking*

“*Meditations on Intention and Being* is a gift of Rolf’s accessible and uncanny wisdom that we can enjoy from our own favorite chair, sofa, or yoga mat right at home.”

—Brian Leaf, author of *Misadventures of a Garden State Yogi*

“A masterful work of art. My heart is more open, my mind is quieter, and my purpose is clearer after reading this extraordinary book.”

—Sarah Gardner, founder, Yoga Reaches Out

“An excellent guide to further all of us down our personal path of knowledge and understanding. As Rolf talks about how some of these life lessons came to him, we see how they often appear in simple, everyday occurrences. As he points out, we should take these teachings where we find them and apply them however works. So no matter what happens, no matter where we find ourselves in the metaphorical sense, just keep paddling.”

—Gerry Lopez, legendary surfer, actor, and author of *Surf is Where You Find It*

“Rolf speaks to us out of his own struggles and learnings, his own ongoing path of growth, and his own authenticity, humility, and self-compassion.”

—Gordon Wheeler, president, Esalen Institute

#### About the Author

Rolf Gates, author of the acclaimed book on yogic philosophy, *Meditations from the Mat: Daily Reflections on the Path of Yoga*, conducts yoga workshops, retreats, teacher trainings, and coaching and mentorship programs throughout the U.S. and abroad—and online. Rolf and his work have been featured in numerous media, including *Yoga Journal*, *ORIGINS*, *Natural Health*, *People Magazine*, and *Travel and Leisure’s 25 Top Yoga Studios in the World*. Rolf is the co-founder of the Yoga, Meditation and Recovery Conference at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California and the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health in Lenox, Massachusetts and a teacher at Spirit Rock Insight Meditation Center in Northern California. He is also on the Advisory Board for the Yoga Service Council and the Veterans Yoga Project. A former addictions counselor and U.S. Army Airborne Ranger who has practiced meditation for over twenty-five years, Rolf brings his eclectic background to his practice and his teachings. Rolf and his wife, Mariam Gates, author of *Good Night Yoga: A Pose by Pose Bedtime Story*, live in Santa Cruz, California with their two children.

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#### Chapter One

#### Effortlessness

*“The pose is what you are doing. Yoga is how you are being in the pose.” —Rolf Gates*

I have chosen to begin with a chapter on effort. The remainder of the book will be about things that we do and choices that we make, and I feel that it’s important, before embarking on that journey, to explain that how we perform an action is as important as the action itself.

Sometimes, even when we apply ourselves to all the right things for all the right reasons and get good results, we continue to experience the same inner suffering that drove us to seek help in the first place. It feels as though we will never be free of a nagging inner tension, a belief that as much as we want things to be okay,

they never will be. This can be a permanent state of affairs but it does not have to be. With the right support we can discover something simple and easy to remember that will alter how we approach the process of change. We come to see that how we are being is more important than what we are doing.

Doing a yoga pose while attached to a specific result is not the practice of yoga, it is the practice of attachment. Attachment focuses on the results and pulls our attention away from the process and opportunities for positive outcomes that present themselves as a moment unfolds. Starting a career, ending a marriage, or raising a family in a state of attachment to the outcome, likewise, is the practice of attachment and will yield the results of attachment. We can't free ourselves from a way of being without consciously letting go of that way of being. We must let go of what the Buddhists call our "contracted states" if we wish to experience what exists beyond them.

When I first started out as a yoga teacher, I tried to teach people to be in a pose without the effort of control or attachment. These two forms of effort felt to me as if they were at the heart of most contracted states. In my own practice, when I could identify the energies of attachment and control within me and let them go, I could access inner stillness, deepen my awareness of the present moment, and arrive at an overall steadier place on my mat and on my cushion. Control and attachment were obscuring my connection to the present moment, and when I was able to let them go things improved rapidly. I wanted my students to experience this. But it is my belief that telling someone not to do something is not as helpful as telling someone what to do. So I maintained the same intention but kept refining my language. Eventually, I began to teach students to hold a pose with the intention of effortlessness.

I had been teaching yoga as the embodiment of intention for some time. I would, for example, teach students to come into the intentions of awareness and ease in their bodies, and to rest in the felt experience of those intentions. How are these intentions being expressed? Is the energy of control there? Is the energy of attachment there? I began to ask, "Can you allow the expression of those intentions to be effortless?" Spiritual practice can be understood as cultivating the habit of meeting low-energy patterns, like ill will or craving, with high-energy intentions, like kindness and generosity. This process finds its true potential when we discover the ability to hold a high-energy intention effortlessly.

Yoga finds its relevance when it can impact the way we are moving through life. My personal intention for my relationships is that I embody wisdom and compassion as I relate to my students, joy and equanimity as I drive my children to school, steadiness and ease as I sit in meditation, and loving-kindness and appreciation as I have lunch with my wife.

In my experience, I can seek to embody love while also being attached to the results of my actions and still trying to control others. I can create inner turmoil with the very practices that are designed to relieve it. To express an intention effortlessly empties the intention of anything extra. I can be love without attachment, awareness without control. This chapter explores the felt experience of effortlessness.

## DAY 1

### Getting Set

The air that travels across the Pacific Ocean before it reaches land has a special aliveness and sweetness to it. Breathing it feels like drinking the purest water. Waking in the early morning, I find a stillness that can be felt the way Pacific Ocean air can be breathed. Most days this stillness is the first thing I bring my conscious attention to. In the quiet darkness, I listen to it the way you listen to a breeze moving through fall leaves, breathing it in with my whole body. Taking my seat for meditation is a deliberate process. Steady in my connection to the earth (sits bones even), with a strong center (core), rooted in spirit (aware and engaged through the back of my torso), I offer my heart (shoulder integration) and align my will and my wisdom to

the divine (ears over shoulders). The physical effort of coming into alignment is then transferred to the inner body, which brightens as the outer body softens. The balancing of my inner body and my outer body is arrived at effortlessly. The stillness of the seat I've taken vanishes into the stillness of the morning.

## DAY 2

### Knowing That I Am Sitting When I Am Sitting

Once I have taken my seat, I begin the process of letting go. The momentum that got me to my seat is no longer required in the way that walking is no longer required once you have arrived at your destination. Taking my seat is a shift from thinking to feeling. The rest of my meditation practice is a continuation of that process. The first thing I feel into is my body and the fact that I can be consciously aware of it without commentary. I spend time in the mystery of knowing that I am sitting when I am sitting. My body, and my awareness of it, brings me into direct contact with the ordinary nature of the miraculous. I am living, embodied awareness, within and expressing an eternal moment the way a wave is within and expresses the ocean. At the heart of this dynamic experience is an effortless stillness that feels like home to me.

## DAY 3

### Just Passing Through

Connecting to stillness is like connecting to silence. We come to see that stillness and silence form the backdrop of our lives and that everything else is just passing through. Sounds come and go, sensations come and go, thoughts, emotions, all of them traveling through stillness and silence like fish moving through an eternal ocean or weather traveling across an eternal sky. As I begin my meditation, my body carries with it the experience of stillness and my mind becomes silent. I become the sky that holds the weather. Resting in the felt experience of my body, I am able to give my full attention to the weather of my life, to care for what is coming and going with wisdom and compassion, to love what is just passing through.

## DAY 4

### Life's Heartbeat

Sound travels through silence in patterns we call rhythm. Sensation travels through awareness in rhythms. Movements arise and pass rhythmically. A funny joke, a well-taught yoga class, the sound of anger, the pitch of joy, the rocking of a baby to sleep—all of it is rhythm. It is said that everything in the physical universe is information vibrating at different rhythms; the study of life amounts to the study of rhythm. Time spent in silence and stillness reveals this to be true. There is the eternal moment and there are the rhythms it holds like the sky holding weather. The first rhythm I was taught to feel into, or experience, was the rhythm of the breath. As I did so I discovered life's heartbeat. Within the rhythm of my breathing is the rhythm of all the breaths and all the heartbeats. Within the rhythm of my breathing lies the secret that I am every being and every being is me.

## DAY 5

### The First Breath

A friend of mine told me about a teacher who said to him, "I know the last thing you will do." My friend was taken aback, but nonetheless he asked the teacher, "Okay, what will be the last thing I do?" The teacher replied, "You will exhale." I have heard my friend tell this story a few times, and it always gets a laugh and gets people thinking. Our thoughts turn to our last breath and then, I believe, most of us reflect on our first breath. What was it like, to awaken into this world on an inhale? After a period of meditation on the body I begin to include the rhythm of the breath. Having rested in the felt experience of sitting, I begin to rest in the felt experience of sitting and breathing. As my attention moves into the breath there is always a moment of awakening to the act of breathing as I take my first full inhale.

## DAY 6

## Sitting and Breathing

Yoga practice is intensely practical and wastes nothing. To learn about life you study movement and stillness. Walking becomes a practice, standing becomes a practice, lying down and doing nothing becomes a practice, sitting and breathing becomes a practice. In the peace of the early morning, as I let go of the need to do anything or be anywhere else, I find myself sitting and breathing in the midst of a world waking up. Birdsong moving in and out of silence, cool morning air drifting on the subtlest of currents, the smell of earth and leaves wet from ocean fog, eternal silence, stillness, and space. I have a friend whose love of ocean diving began when she realized the tiny crab she was observing at the bottom of the Caribbean Sea shared a world that stretched around the entire planet. Sitting and breathing, we begin to understand the vastness of the moment in which we exist.

## DAY 7

### Resting

I held my son, Dylan, for the first forty-five minutes or so of his life. I watched as his eyes opened and he saw light for the first time. He looked at me and he smiled. The nurses said it could not be but it was. Once we brought Dylan home I held him in many different ways. I had a sling he could live in like a cave, a snugly he rested in on my chest, one-armed and two-armed carries, a backpack; however I carried him we were always so close we could feel each other's heartbeats. To this day when Dylan is upset he lies on my chest so that his heart is on my heart and he just lets go. Sitting and breathing is like that for me: resting my heart in life's heart and learning to let go.

## DAY 8

### Becoming Available

It is said that the mind screams and the heart whispers. Over time we have lost touch with the wisdom of the heart in our efforts to manage the demands of our screaming minds. Instead of learning to listen we have learned to numb and to filter. The sensations that get through our filters and our numbness become supersized. Fear becomes violence, desire becomes gluttony, service to one's community becomes workaholicism. More is never enough. Arising out of this state of imbalance is its opposite, a study of the subtle whose end point is the heart's whisper. This study is called yoga, and we make a beginning when we become available to what is happening right now. While sitting we become available to the felt experience of sitting. While breathing we become available to the felt experience of breathing. Sitting and breathing as the world wakes up, we become available to the world waking up.

## DAY 9

### Plans

I tend to make a plan and then get attached to it. Anything that is not according to plan is not welcome. My time as a military officer did not lessen this propensity, nor have my years spent running the show in various capacities as a "senior" teacher. I always have a plan and so I know how things are supposed to go—according to plan, obviously. Despite a lifetime of negative consequences brought about by living this way, I did not reconsider it until my first child was born. At that point the frustrations to my plans reached an unprecedented level. Nothing about a day with a baby goes according to any plan you have ever made. My plans were a straight line and life was revealing itself to be a nonlinear series of moments. My family did not live within my lines; my wife and daughter lived in the open space of the moment. What I needed was a way to become available to a life that was a living moment rather than a plan. It was then that I discovered sitting and breathing effortlessly.

## DAY 10

### Learning to Swim

On my first meditation retreat I was surprised by how little instruction I received. There was a talk each night

and some lecturing each morning, but for about twenty-three out of every twenty-four hours I was on my own. There was plenty of structure and accountability—we did walking and sitting meditation in forty-five-minute periods all day—but there just was not a lot of handholding and I felt some handholding was in order. Left to my own devices I began to create a routine for myself within the routine of the retreat: when I would have tea, when I would walk outside, when I would make time for some yoga poses. I found a place to take in the sunset over a snow-covered field. I learned to create a good day out of a number of good moments, my plans to give the organizers some “feedback” at the end of the retreat forgotten as I sat astonished by the aching beauty of a forest quietly allowing the passage of a winter’s day. By trusting me my teachers were teaching me to trust myself and to trust life.

## DAY 11

### Return Is the Movement

It was not necessary for my meditation teachers to fill my days with intellectual content. In fact, that would have been the opposite of what I needed. What they were providing me with was the opportunity to see and feel something that had always been there but that I had lost touch with in the growing busyness and confusion of the echo chamber of my mind. The forest did not stage a special one-time-only winter day because I had paid to be on that retreat; the world had been effortlessly manifesting its stillness and rhythms every second of my existence. There was just a little work I had to do to be present for it. The gift of yoga is not something new; it is something being returned to us.

## Users Review

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