

# The staying power of intention

How setting the right intention can help you stick with a meditation practice. By Richard Miller, PhD

**AS WITH EVERY JOURNEY** in life, every meditation session and practice is better when it begins with an intention. *Sankalpas*, as intentions are known in yoga, are your heartfelt, intuitively sensed attitudes that unfold within you over time. They are powerful internal agreements that you make with yourself and then express through your actions, whether it's in your relationships, at work, or on your yoga mat or meditation cushion. Sankalpas foster focus, motivation, determination, patience, and perseverance—all qualities that enable you to develop, sustain, and deepen a meditation practice.

If you don't set firm intentions, you'll eventually lose sight of the reason you're meditating, and you'll find yourself wandering off course. A simple, specific *sankalpa* could be to meditate daily or to take 10 one-minute meditation breaks throughout your day, ensuring you carve out time for meditation regardless of your state of mind or the length of your to-do list. Or, if you need help focusing once you get to your meditation cushion, you can set a *sankalpa* to inquire into a particular emotion or belief, to focus on being aware of all that's arising in your body

and mind, or ultimately to be aware of being aware. No intention is either too small or too large. The point is to discover and affirm the intentions that are right for you.

## Find your intentions

Genuine intentions arise from your innate, essential nature—the force that drives you to breathe, eat, and seek shelter (as well as to find a connection to something bigger, or to seek enlightenment). Take time with the exercise on page 36 to discover your genuine intentions, write them down, and engage them for your practice. Do this when you first start a meditation practice, but also any time you lose focus along your meditation journey. Keep in mind that intentions are concise statements that harness your determination to achieve specific outcomes. It's important, then, when building your intentions to say what you mean and mean what you say. Instead of saying “I may” or “I will,” affirm “I do!”

To start, write down words or phrases that best describe your answers to the questions on the following page. Take time to ponder each question; your answers

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## practice well **MEDITATION**

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should be both practical and realistic according to your present lifestyle and situation. Remember, it's better to do little and succeed on those terms than to be overly ambitious and not succeed at all.

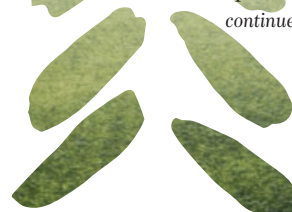
1. *What is my deepest desire for practicing meditation?*
2. *How many minutes each session am I truly willing to dedicate to the practice?*
3. *How many days a week am I truly willing to meditate?*
4. *With respect to a particular meditation session, what is my deepest desire for and during this session? (For instance, is your goal to welcome a particular sensation or to remain undistracted by what's arising in your awareness, and instead to experience and abide as awareness?)*

Now, reread your responses and pay attention to how true each feels on an intuitive level in your body. For instance, when you affirm each statement, does it feel "right" in your gut or heart—and not just in your thinking mind? Circle keywords or phrases that resonate with you.

Then, express each intention as a concise statement of fact in the present tense, as if it's already true. This enables your subconscious mind to register your intentions as actualities instead of possibilities, giving them greater power to materialize. For example, instead of saying, "I will meditate five days a week for 20 minutes each time," affirm, "I meditate five days a week for 20 minutes each time."

Next, pick one, two, or even three intentions and shorten them into simple, easily remembered phrases. For instance: "I meditate three times a week for 10 minutes each time" can be stated as "Three and 10!" "I'm kind and compassionate

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### **Ancient wisdom**

The importance of intention is beautifully expressed in the ancient Hindu holy book the Rig Veda, which states: "Resolutely follow and affirm your intentions, for they line the path that enables you to overcome all trials, tribulations, and suffering. Following and affirming your intentions is the true path that leads to genuine happiness."

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## practice well MEDITATION

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### Take a seat

Practice meditating in various positions—supine, prone, sitting, standing, walking—so it becomes easier to integrate meditation into your daily life. When sitting on a cushion, keep your knees below your hips to maintain the normal curves in your spine. Rest your arms in a comfortable position on your lap with your palms upturned, gently lengthen your neck, and soften your forehead, eyes, ears, and jaw, releasing any unwanted tension throughout your body. Finally, state your intentions and dive into your meditation.

toward myself” becomes “Kindness!” And “I speak truth in each and every moment” becomes “Truth!”

Finally, repeat your intentions internally to yourself at the beginning of, throughout, and at the end of every meditation practice. Always affirm your intentions with deep feeling and certainty, with your entire body and mind.

### Stay the course

Follow the steps we’ve outlined so far and watch what happens when, for instance, you’re slipping into bed at the end of the day without having meditated. Your intention to meditate daily will then prompt you to get out of bed and meditate, so that you can keep your agreement with yourself. Strong intentions keep you on track and enable you to meet your goals, no matter what’s going on in your life. Nourish and affirm your intentions with patience, persistence, perseverance, and love, and they will never fail you! 🙏

Richard Miller, PhD, is the founding president of the Integrative Restoration Institute (*irest.us*), co-founder of the International Association of Yoga Therapists, and author of *iRest Meditation* and *Yoga Nidra*. This is his first in a series of 10 columns designed to help you create a lasting and impactful meditation practice.



### LISTEN

For an audio version of this intention-setting practice, visit [yogajournal.com/meditationpractice](http://yogajournal.com/meditationpractice)