

# RUMINATE

## What We Talk About When We Talk About Meditation

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BY LORI WALD  
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My friend Michael had just come through a complicated operation, the kind of surgery where wisps of death swirl close and recovery has little to do with returning to normal and much to do with adjusting to the realities of an abbreviated colon. I brought a fuzzy blanket to the hospital for him even though it is the kind of thing I fully expected him to find ridiculous. Post-surgery Michael held the blanket up to his cheek and tried to say thank you, but instead he cried a little. I thought I should take the fuzzy blanket and tuck it in around him. I thought about it, but I didn't do it.

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Roxanne was already sitting in the armchair next to Michael's bed when I arrived. Even though she was a doctor and was used to focusing on fixing people, Roxanne was never afraid to gaze directly at things that could not be remedied. She was the one who suggested I bring a gift for Michael that was soft and cozy and touchable. She was there as much for me as for Michael, even though she appreciated how seasoned I was at hospital visitation.

Sure, I knew how to seal up my nostrils from the inside to block the stench of disinfectant blocking even worse stench of various bodily fluids, but today's visit was to a friend who had been my rock when I was in the midst of paying all those visits to my very sick and dying husband. Michael had been a source of strength for me, skillful with sarcasm and masterful at applying a sane and rational outlook to the most dire of situations. I wondered if the smart, sarcastic personality I knew would ever return to the patient who lay crated on both sides by metal rails, exposed and open to the present moment as only the very ill and vulnerable can be.

"Everything okay in here?" It was a nurse or possibly a nurse's assistant, but he looked like a surfer dude. **The question was ridiculous because obviously nothing was okay in here.** But, Michael managed to answer that yes, everything was fine. The dude inspected the couple of IV tubes hooked to my friend's chest. There had been a feeding tube in his nose a couple of days earlier, but Michael had pulled it out and the doctors decided not to put it back.

"The nose tube was the worst," Michael reported to the nurse and I wondered if I'd said something about this out loud or whether Michael now had some sort of extra-sensory-perception thing going on.

Outside, the sun dispensed sparkles on the sidewalks and rainbows in the fancy water fountains. People wore sunglasses and downed bottles of water, readying themselves to go back into the refrigerated hospital air. But you couldn't see any of

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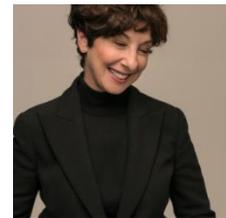
that from in here. The only light in this room was frail and fluorescent because the shades were drawn tight.

Michael wasn't exactly asleep, but he wasn't exactly awake either. We talked, the three of us, about the things we cannot control and how the simplest things might be overwhelming and insurmountable. Roxanne said the only thing to do was to breathe. She said: I say the serenity prayer all the time. All the time. And it helps. She said: Lori likes to meditate.

**I do. I told them I liked to meditate because meditation is about everything.**

Roxanne asked what I meant by that and Michael tugged at the blanket so it nestled against his cheek. I wished I had acknowledged how difficult it was to muster the courage to be a dignified and respectful witness to my sick friend's struggle. I feared I would fall far short of what he had provided for me when I was the vulnerable and weak one and he had bestowed upon me his humor and compassion and clear-eyed gaze. I explained. The practice of meditation is a practice of learning not to turn away from the painful, rather to turn toward it with compassion for the pain as well as for yourself. Meditation, like breathing, makes everything else possible. The practice of meditation connected my breath with my life with my goals with my passions with my anxieties.

Then we sat there for a long while, the three of us, breathing.



Lori Ellen Wald, lawyer, educator and writer has practiced meditation (emphasis on practice!) for the past eight years. She has been published in Lumina, Lilith, the Cleveland Plain Dealer and the Journal of the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association. Her passion is to bring mindfulness meditation to lawyers and other people with busy brains. The above essay is part of her memoir-in-progress, *The Untimidated Meditator's Guide to Nothing*. You can read her musings on meditation at [nothingdoingdaily.com](http://nothingdoingdaily.com).

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