

Enough

by Elizabeth Gibbs

It's October in the Catskill Mountains of New York and I'm in the middle of a sweat popping Sun Salute Strength Series, incorporating the warrior, triangle, and side arm balance. I'm struggling to hold up my body's weight on one foot and one hand.

"Hang in there," says Joan, "Breathe. Feel your power. Let me hear some deep sighs."

I sigh and hang in. I like Joan's style of Hatha yoga. It keeps me reaching for my personal edge.

Fourteen years ago I didn't know what to reach for. I was thirty-seven years old, divorced, a single parent with a full time job in broadcasting and twenty one credits toward a master's degree in Communications at the University of Hartford. Picture this scenario and read the sub titles - - "middle class, African American woman/feminist, tries to "do it all" and be a "credit to her race" to prove herself competent, capable, and connected."

It was not an easy time. Underneath the struggling and juggling, I was constipated and stressed. I developed TMJ (temporal mandibular joint dysfunction). I felt crazy. I needed to find something. So I went looking for enlightenment in one of my favorite places - - a bookstore.

I combed the self-help sections looking for a quick fix, a change in diet, a new exercise program, or a different way of thinking. I read them all and tried most of them. Nothing worked. Then I picked up a book by the late Richard Hittleman, and along with the dawning of the Age of Aquarius, I discovered yoga. The physicality of it appealed to me enormously. It felt like dancing. I loved to dance. It relaxed me. I needed to relax.

It was a perfect fit. I was hooked. I bought books. I bought tapes. I practiced alone, in true introvert fashion, and waited for enlightenment. It seemed like enough.

"Now, says Joan, "we'll do some backward bends to balance out our efforts this morning. We'll begin with alternate leg lifts and then do the full locust."

I follow along carefully, feeling how much my spine has loosened up over the years. Glued to the ground from chin to pelvis, I inhale both my legs off the ground and feel them "float up". "This is a powerful strengthener for the back," she says, "so squeeze that butt. A few groans and sighs would feel good about now." My legs ache with the effort but I groan and sigh and squeeze and hold just a bit longer than I think I can before lowering them.

During a vacation on Martha's Vineyard four years ago, a friend took me to my first yoga class. The energy that came from being part of that small group was amazing. It boosted my staying power, gave me courage to try some of the tougher postures, and deepened my relaxation at the end of class. The progress I made by going to class daily for a week was incredible. That summer class at the Yoga Studio in Edgartown became an annual ritual, a touchstone. That, plus my on again, off again solitary home practice seemed like enough.

Joan releases us to roll over and rest in Savasana. "Just let yourself blob out on the ground and feel the energy circulate." Her voice is soft, soothing and very musical. Blobbing out after a major effort is something I look forward to.

"Welcome the benefits of the universe. Feel yourself melt into the ground. Breathe deeply. Inhale through the head; roll the breath down the body. Exhale it out through the toes. Relax."

I am at the New Age Health Spa's first ever yoga weekend. I am halfway between

sleep and wakefulness - floating between somewhere and here at the same time.

Wonderful! As good as sex and better than chocolate.

I'm a lot better at managing stress these days. I haven't been constipated in years. My TMJ bite plate gathers mildew on the top shelf of the medicine cabinet. Weekly yoga classes and a growing daily practice are as important to me as breathing. I no longer think that "enlightenment" will come suddenly, bliss me out and take away all my struggles. I rejoice in the fact that underneath the African, underneath the American and underneath the woman, is a being that can occasionally and surprisingly "be here now." In those fleeting moments, I can rest amid chaos and be present in the midst of my life with all its problems and joys. I can experience it and me at the same time. I am competent, capable and connected, a credit to universal consciousness in all its forms. And that is enough.

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