



BYRON BAY

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What if the doorway is not through struggle and effort? What if softness and letting go lead us through the door? What is so scary about letting go?

What are *you* scared of? Pause here for a moment. Breathe deeply. Ask again. Ask yourself,

"Self, what am I scared of?" Over and over again keep asking this question. If you come up with nothing, chances are you are not fully alive.

I feel my feet at the front of my mat and breathe. "Vande Gurunam Caranaravinde ..."

Tapping into this ancient source I begin. I inhale my arms over head and exhale release my spine and head toward my legs. I inhale lengthen my spine and lift my heart. I exhale back into chaturanga. In this way, every day, I begin my practice.



YOGA SHALA



THE OCEAN



GANESHA

Ashtanga Yoga December 2, 2012 continued ...

I begin when I am scared. I begin when I am open. I begin when I am lonely. I begin when my body feels like singing. I begin when my body feels like crying. I begin when I am in love. I begin when I am heartbroken. I begin when I am in Berkeley. I begin when I am in Byron Bay. The same way - with the same beloved breath, I begin.

Dena asked me on day two what I wanted her help with during my time here. I told her I wanted her help to keep walking through, and working with, my fear.

"Ok," she said. She didn't ask what I was scared of - whether it was a particular asana or a particular situation in life.

Today in practice, my body felt good. It was a day of pure song - steady, solid, focused, and free. That is until, I began to approach kapotasana. My heart started to race and I could feel Dena's eyes upon me. "Here it is," I thought. "This is what you asked for. This is what you are scared of. Clearly she knows." I have come to peace with this pose when I am practicing at home. In this moment, I realize that it is no longer the pose in and of itself that scares me. It's the adjustment in the pose that scares me. In this pose you are lifting up on your knees. You backbend, reaching your arms up and back. Ultimately placing your head on the ground and your hands on your

feet. For me, it is the most vulnerable asana that I have experienced - to have my heart fully exposed while my head sets on the ground and my hands cover my feet, and then to have someone come and place their hands on me.

As I was trying to settle my mind and heart and ground through my knees and the tops of my feet, Dena arrived at the front of my mat. "Let's see what you got" she said. I inhaled my arms up overhead and then exhaled them back as slowly as I could while lengthening through my waist. She said, "breath!" She took my hands and moved them to my heels and held them there. "Breath!" she emphasized.

"One ... two ... three ... four ... five. Straighten your arms. One ... two ... three ... four ... five. Come up."

At that point I began swimming in the tumultuous sea. I was somewhere under water. I knew she was saying something else, but I could no longer hear her. I stayed incredibly still. I looked up and she was helping someone in another pose and she looked at me. I said, "I know you told me to do something, but I didn't understand you." She said, "I know. Just wait."

She came over to my mat again and told me to do three urdhva danurasanas (full backbends)

and then do two more kapotasanas. I felt like I was going to vomit. I felt like my heart was going to take flight and leap from my body. I'm pretty sure I cursed her in my mind. I told her my back hurt. She said, "like there is a catch or like there is a deep, deep ache?"

"A deep ache," I said.

"Oh, that's ok. That's good. Three back bends and then two more kapotasanas."

After my three back bends, there she was at the front of my mat again. I was hoping to do these next two kapotasanas solo. But, to no avail, she was there helping me again. She looked into my eyes before the last one and said, "this one will be the easiest, because now you are completely warmed up."

When my practice was over and I lay in savasana, I felt incredibly alive. The question came into my mind, "What are you scared of?" "What are you scared of?" Answers began to spill forth as tears streamed steadily from my eyes.

It occurs to me that I keep trying as hard as I can to let go, but what if the doorway is not through struggle and effort? What if the letting go is not through doing, but rather undoing. What if it is as soft and effortless as the tears flowing down my cheeks?

Om. Shanti.