

BYRON BAY

NO. 5



We spent Christmas day here on this beach - Clarke's beach in Byron Bay. We swam, did yoga, walked, boogie boarded, dug deep holes that Ren could stand up in and we relaxed. So much gratitude for this trip.

Saturday, December 26, 2009

The last days of my practice with Dena were a combination of gratitude, physical intensity, love, and sadness. So far, this yoga journey

has been far beyond my expectations. I have learned so much about myself, my practice and this body that I live in.

We begin each practice with the opening prayer - asking for the medicine to help us separate from our conditioning so that we



ME & REN ON CHRISTMAS MORNING



JACK CARRYING REN ON HIS BACK AT THE CREEK



DENA AND ISAAC AT THE CREEK

Ashtanga Yoga December 26, 2009 continued . . .

may truly see - so that we may connect with our true nature and not the chatter of the mind.

We are prostrating to Patanjali - showing the deepest gratitude and respect for his teachings. We are bowing to his lotus feet in the humblest of ways and thanking those teacher's teacher's teacher's who came before us and made this practice possible.

I like this asking for the medicine to heal us and make us wholly ourselves. I like this asking for the ability to truly see - ourselves, our partners, our children, strangers, etc. We are soulfully giving it up and asking to be guided.

It is through movement and breath that we are connecting with the divine. It is through repetition that we find freedom from the production of thoughts. It is with the giving up of control to our teacher that we learn and grow and are challenged.

One thing that has been coming through loud and clear is the path of this practice being about stilling the chatter of the mind. "yoga chitta vritti nirodah." This practice is a meditation. Except instead of sitting still to quiet the mind, we have movement, dristi, bhandas, and ujayii breath. If we use these tools of the practice, the result is mind stillness.

Several times Dena talked about this practice being less about the body and more about the mind's reaction to the body. The purer the body gets through the practice, the easier the stilling of the mind becomes.

The purpose of stilling the mind, is so that we have moments where we are in the truth of our experience instead of in the past or the future. The only truth we ever really have is in the question, "what am I experiencing right now?"

And yet, to say this practice is not about the body would be denying a large part of our experience. It starts with the physical and many times comes back to the physical.

During the second to last day of my practice with Dena, she was poking at me in every posture. She made me do many of the postures several times. If I stopped to rest she came over and told me I needed to keep moving. It felt like she was there at every breath, every posture, poking me. She told me I had a lot of bad habits to undo in my practice and that just because I was a yoga teacher and studio owner didn't mean I could get away with not staying focused throughout my entire practice.

Over and over again she said I had more skill than I put to use in my practice and that if I would just focus my mind I could do

it. There is never a lack of challenges in the practice of ashtanga yoga.

The last day of practice, started and ended with me in tears. Not really sure what they were all about, but there they were coming down my cheeks. Sadness from the year and the ending of life and love. Sadness to leave Dena and the connection I have with her as a student, peer and friend. Sadness because of the work it took to get here and now it is over. Sadness from the letting go.

Physically these two weeks have been profound. And yet, the profound physical experience always comes and goes. It ever reminds me of the temporary nature of being human.

I will definitely be headed back to Bryon Bay soon. There is a possibility of me doing a three month one-on-one mentor program with Dena - staying with her and eating with her and practicing with her.

Now, Ren, Noah and I are headed to Gisborne, New Zealand to study with Peter Sanson for the next two weeks. We will be staying with him, his partner Amna, and their one year old baby Manomay.

Several times Dena joked with me that she was going to send a note along with me to Peter so he can continue the poking of me.

Om Shanti