

Learning Curve

Written by Rowe Carenen
Monday, 15 February 2021 08:47



I've spent a fair amount of time during this pandemic obsessively watching the Great British Baking Show. I'm a good cook and killer at desserts, but I would never survive the tent. And I'm ok with that. I just like the learning and discovering the secret to pastry (it really is the butter to dough ratio plus the number of folds). After literal hours, I realize that I relate more to the bakes than the bakers.

It doesn't matter if it is cake week, bread week, or Italian week, each challenge is determined on flavor and presentation. And a soggy bottom is always a failure. What I've learned is that I'm full of nuance and substance, but I'm not done baking. There is more work to be done.

Case in point: I'm 41 and I've just gone back to school. Not to college or university, although if anyone out there wants to pay me to learn the history of book binding, you know where to find me. I've started my Yoga Teacher Training on the 200-hour level. Two hundred hours dedicated to deepening my practice. I've talked about doing it for years, but it seemed like, for a plethora of reasons, I couldn't find the time or means to make it happen. Does that ever happen to you? There's something you keep meaning to do, but somehow you rationalize yourself out of it? Now, I've been practicing yoga for two decades and have a pretty good understanding of the *asanas*

and breath work and that it is a moving meditation, not a workout to give you a great butt (your butt is already great, but there are multiple industries dedicated to making women feel like if they could just deepen their *warriors*

, the butt that they believe to be inadequate will be on par with J-Lo's). It feels like such a luxury to be able to spend hours learning for the sake of knowledge and understanding. I don't have any intention of becoming a yoga instructor, but I do intend to know myself and my world better. This seems like a great place to start. Most days, the best days, I start and end with time on my

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mat. I find myself feeling more rooted and grounded (see, all that yoga-speak is just oozing out like a pork pie with too much juice) the more time I spend in movement with my breath. I'm learning to be kinder to my body because some days I can stand in tree for eons and others I fall right on out of

mountain

. Others I can rest my forearms on the floor in

forward fold

, but yesterday touching my toes took effort.

Do you ever find yourself having to re-learn what should be basic lessons? I'm talking more basic than basic arithmetic. I'm also learning, re-learning, to stop holding my breath. Research shows that most people hold their breath when faced with something hard or painful. I know I do, particularly if it is my heart. As an empath who feels everything so very deeply all of the time, I find myself not taking the deep breaths when the pain is sharp. I've learned to breathe through the dull ache of holding *chair* for what feels like hours or when memories of loves lost set up a picnic in my brain. Harder, at least for me, is to remember to breathe in AND out when sharp pain attacks, like when I had four shots of a numbing agent in my finger that did NOT numb it or when the person I trusted most to be my person went away. I have done no research to back this up, but I think that's because sharp pain is usually indicative of something being wrong. Our body's way of warning us that we are in or at least nearing the danger zone. My usual reaction to anything scary or painful is to either run away with a quickness or immediately find a way to solve the problem. I like solving problems. I like checking things off my to-do list. If I have accomplished something that was not on the list, I go back and add it to the list just so I can check it off (just me?). And sometimes that is exactly the right approach. My knee is not designed to bend that way, maybe shift the posture. My heart constricts in a bad way when talking to a person? Say, "nice to meet you," and then turn and go somewhere else. So when I'm in pain of any kind, I'm lightning fast to breathe in. I take loads of quick sharp inhales. But exhales? Those I forget. Deep inhales, yup forget those too. My chest gets tight and my face gets red because I'm not actually getting the oxygen I need to just exist. I keep taking sips of breath instead of letting it come in deep down to my belly, through my throat and chest, and then back out again. Yoga, and meditation too but that's a whole other article, is an excellent reminder to just be. I do not like sitting in the uncomfortable, no matter the source. And the state of my world in the last year or so has been chock full of all different kinds of pain that required (is still requiring) me to sit in it. The only way out is through, and the only way through is with breath.

The other day I sent one of my favorite people a pic of the outfit of the day with the caption, "My aesthetic: retired librarian becomes yoga enthusiast." She lol-ed and wrote back that I was entirely on brand. But what's actually funny about that is that I was comfortable taking a picture in an incredibly unflattering outfit (my pants were pools of the softest merlot accompanied by a tank and an oversized grandma sweater, bun, and glasses) and sharing it. In years past that just wouldn't have happened. I would've been embarrassed to be so sloppy and uncoordinated,

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felt shame for not having the stereo-typical yoga body, or because I hadn't cleaned up the laundry I was sorting on the floor. But I'm learning to love and embrace who I am, where I am. To just be me and do my best to be comfortable in this body in this life that I've cultivated. And the trick to it all? Never ever stop learning.

I know I'm definitely not done baking. I know that there are whole worlds out there, and in here, that need exploration. And I love exploring. I don't even need a map. I just need to remember to breathe in AND out.

So what about you? What are you learning, re-learning? How do you manage painful, either physical or otherwise, situations?

Rowe Carenen is a graduate of Salem College and the University of Southern Mississippi. When asked, she'd say that poetry has been her passion ever since she realized that words could convey more than just the facts. Her poems have appeared in various literary journals and magazines, and her first collection, "In the Meantime," was published by Neverland Publishing in 2014. "Her second collection of poetry First Drafts from the Brewery," is forthcoming from Unsolicited Press. She lives in Greenville, SC with her cat Minerva Jane and dog Neville Jameson.