

The Gift of Covid-19

I finally got my students to practice in their living room. Ok, maybe it was COVID, but nonetheless, they are now not only taking live streamed classes, but progressing more than ever. Taking a class on zoom forces you to be more present, to make choices for yourself, and to focus.

I have seen the growth of my students during this time. It is in difficult times that we are forced to face ourselves. This quarantine, or yoga retreat as I like to think of it, has given us all a reality check. What am I doing? What do I really want to be doing? And for many of us, it has put us face to face with Yama, the Lord of Death.

I started having COVID symptoms on a Friday. I wanted to quickly erase my sore throat and headache, as I had signed up for two weekends with Raya, as a fundraiser for the Indigenous people of Brazil. As an Iyengar Yoga practitioner since 1995, and having been born in Rio de Janeiro, I thought it would be cool to participate in this fundraiser, with a teacher from RIMYI, and to hear instructions translated into Portuguese.

Saturday morning, I signed on to my zoom class, feeling a little achy. When Raya started teaching Trikonasana, I felt weak and shaky, so I used the wall behind me for support. Urdhva Hastasana left me breathless, so I adapted. I did all the standing poses on the floor, with my feet on the wall so I could conserve my energy and still follow the class. The rest of the day, I rested.

Sunday morning, my aches increased, especially in my joints. I felt so old. Even standing or sitting up felt like an effort, so I sat up against my couch for support during the invocation and modified the poses according to how they made me feel. The rest of the week brought on more discomfort. My body felt like someone else's body. Everything hurt, and my eyes were watery. Inhaling felt like I had cotton in my lungs. My mind was fuzzy, and my body temperature fluctuated from cold and hot. I practiced Adho Mukha Virasana with a bolster supporting my front groins and abdomen. It was the best pose to calm my inflamed nerves all over my body.

In trying to understand what was afflicting my body, I researched European medical sites. I had never felt the way I was feeling, therefore had no frame of reference for how to handle it with my yoga practice. I learned that COVID causes inflammation of the endothelial cells, which line the blood vessels. They are everywhere, so everything hurt, including my brain. My usual go to pose when my nervous system feels agitated, Supta Baddha Konasana, was impossible. All supine poses made me feel like someone was stepping on my sternum and pushing down. Prone poses and twists were fabulous, as long as I had support. My endurance was zero. I experimented with the poses by entering them in a touch and go fashion. The only pose that I could find peace for a long time was child's pose. So, I embraced my inner child, and rested on my bolster as if it were a soothing teddy bear.

As the studio owner of Yogarosa in the Miami area, I am very blessed to have a team of teachers who always step up to the plate. They taught all my classes, while I laid on my side, and kept up what I could of my practice. Thank goodness for BKS and Geeta Iyengar, as I feel they helped me through this. COVID affected my brain, and made me severely depressed, to the point of contemplating jumping off my 8th story balcony.

Luckily, I recognized those toxic feelings when I had postpartum depression 25 years back. I went on my mat and did Adho Mukha Svanasana, with support under my head, and immediately my brain was soothed. I could not stay, so I entered and exited the pose a few times, resting in my teddy bear child's pose in between.

My favorite classes at RIMYI have always been the medical classes, and every time I saw something I was unfamiliar with, I would try it in my own practice to see how it felt. I was armed with lots of props at home to experiment, and as Guruji, to make myself a human laboratory. It was me against COVID.

Today, it has been about 15 weeks since I first felt symptoms, and I am still not back to my pre COVID practice. I continue to explore new and old sensations in various configurations of postures and ways of practicing various pranayama techniques. As I gain my strength slowly, I realize that this experience was a gift.

I have been able to study with all my teachers from around the globe more than ever. I was supposed to be in Pune in July, and Prashant ended up in my living room, and will return in September for my birthday. I have taken classes with Abhijata in various countries, and feel blessed to be trilingual, so I get to hear her messages twice. (Although some things are lost in translation.) I was able to host my teacher Devki Desai for weekly classes through Yogarosa. I took a pranayama course with Patricia Walden, and many days in different countries with Edwin Bryant.

Along the way, I discovered other many wonderful teachers, which added to my process of healing. The best part of it all is that on the days that I thought Yama was getting closer, I thought to myself, "I can't die yet, I haven't finished writing my book!"

COVID gave me the opportunity to stay in bed for 6 weeks. As any mother knows, this is a luxury. Being so sick gave me time to deepen my Svadyayah, but also helped me to realize what I really want to do next. The answer was writing. To write, something had to go. So, I decided to release myself from the responsibilities of being a yoga studio owner, and I let go of the physical space at 110 N Federal Hwy., Suite 304, in Hallandale Beach, FL. Yogarosa is not closed. Yogarosa is now free to reach more people who need this work in their life. We will continue to offer live-streamed classes to help our community and will emerge out of the yoga retreat when the time is right. In the meantime, stay tuned.

COVID will go away, but like a relationship that ends, we are left with gifts. Strength, resilience, and also, we realize what we don't want, which gives us the clarity to be free and to go find our dream relationship.

Namaste,
Rosa