

Finding Tadasana by Barb Perlmutter

It is August 15, 2001, and I am lying in a hospital bed. It is the night before my surgery to remove a large ovarian tumor found a few days earlier. We had suspected that my stomach pains were probably giardia as I had been over in Eastern Washington not long before. Cancer? It never, ever occurred to me! It is now 2:30 a.m. and I am awake, terrified of what might come. The city lights shine softly into my room. I am thoroughly exhausted from a week in the hospital. I am in pain and beyond hunger, not having eaten since I arrived. The moment has finally arrived when I realize there is no way out of this besides going through it. Repeatedly my mind keeps forming the question: "How am I going to go through this alone?" My tired, scared body tenses. Somehow, I float off into sleep. I receive this dream....

I am with a couple of friends and we are in my husband's van driving up a beautiful mountain. We stop near a little creek, hop out of the car and scramble down the river-bank to the water's edge. The colors are so beautiful; the yellows and reds of autumn, they didn't have such a strong desire for the sun. Some weeds will crack through concrete to follow this yearning. Watching a tiny seed break open and unfold its leafy arms, and six weeks later, see the gorgeous plant it's become is a deep object of contemplation. If we humans didn't have such a strong desire to evolve beyond our primitive impulses, we wouldn't have turned toward the sun of meditation, body practices, pranayama, community, spirituality, and love. Desire is what gets me on my mat every day, desire is what makes me want to do my best as a person, friend, teacher, student. Desire is what keeps me reading and learning, practicing and experimenting.

There is a season of rest and quiet. As I write this, it is November, and I have been "putting the garden to bed," for the coming winter. I cut back yellow fading leaves, rake up dead flowers, plant bulbs in their secret little beds. The plants pull their senses in, becoming silent and private, putting away their fancy clothes and hats. At this time of year,

the days are dark and one's energy is reflective and more internal. Often I will practice yoga in a way that is less striving — I will watch my breath and see how it is not just air, but a consciousness that can be sensed through my entire body. I will luxuri-ate in slow, deep asana that lights a simmer-ing fire. Sometimes this fire builds into a more flamboyant practice of physical asana; sometimes this fire beautifully glows into a steady inner delight in the most refined of movements and sensations. The plants teach me that it is wise to rest, to fold into myself, to draw back. I know that the season of sun and exuberance will come again.

I did NOT have to do this alone. All of my “tribes” were present...family, friends, kids, stepkids, old and young. I recalled Denise's instruction about aligning ourselves in asana so that life force can flow through us. I knew that what I needed to do was to posi-tion myself so that I could see and receive all that is in my life to support me.

In my mind's eye, I planted the four corners of my feet and stood strongly in the only Tadasana I was able to do. Mountain pose, the place where I could stop mus-cling my way through and rest deeply and strongly into the earth, bounding up and into love, into where I could find what I needed to face the surgery and the long recovery ahead.

Since that day, I have learned a lot about surrender and rest. I have learned more than I ever wanted to learn about opening to the unknown and surviving. Oddly enough, I have also learned so much about really liv-ing. I am still learning to ride the waves of my energy, trusting that I will go on, while allowing for the unpredictability of each breath, each pose.

Sometimes when I am in that place between wakefulness and sleep I practice exhaling and letting my body get really heavy. I imagine dropping into the earth. I remember the dream and my tribes, my friends, the yoga community, my family and stepkids who have all been there for me. Then I drift peacefully into a deep, deep rest.

It is August 15, 2002, one year later. I am six months out of chemotherapy, have grown some curly hair, and all my post-tests so far are perfect. I could never have gotten through this year without yoga. Sometimes yoga was simply breathing, sometimes imagining doing an asana. Sometimes I would just take out my mat and lie down. My yoga practice, despite its' drastic change in form, was incredibly instrumental for me. I am deeply and profoundly grateful for every loving note, every kind thought, every practice dedicated to me. Denise, I am so grateful to you for nurturing our yoga community. It has truly been sustaining to me in this time of such uncertainty. Namasté.