

*Musings on Yoga and Nature: **Surrounded by cherry blossoms***

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Wandering the streets of Victoria brings amazing gifts. While often empty these days of people due to their expression of community and self care, they are also so full of remarkable beings such as our plum and cherry trees showing off the beauty of blossoms. Planted decades ago street-by-street with different varieties of plum and cherry they continue to amaze and enchant. When you look out the windows at Moksana on our side of the street, you will first notice the two birches with their white papery bark. Then, looking left towards the corner of Government and Pandora you see the fading blossoms of a couple of *Cherry Plum* trees. Directly across the street in front of the McPherson Theatre a *Hill Cherry* tree is in full BLOOM.



*Ephemerality*

Photograph by brad davis

While I have come to learn some trees of our bioregion, our urban trees are such an eclectic mix of species. One resource that has supported me in getting to know these amazing beings that are such a source of inspiration, comfort and joy is the city of Victoria's interactive tree map <http://opendata.victoria.ca/datasets/tree-species>. You can click on a tree icon on a street and it will tell you the species and its common name. Finding the earlier blooming plums to the cherries, many in full blossoming now, along with the many others such as the ash, and birch and Hawthorne. And of course our indigenous *Arbutus* and Douglas Fir an integral part of this land back to early times when it was simply the lands of the Lekwungen peoples.

In recent years I have brought to my yin yoga classes the story of the Japanese practice of '*hanami*' - 'flower (*hana*) watching'. As we navigate these next weeks I thought that there are aspects of this practice that could nourish all our yoga practices, along with simply living life caring for ourselves and caring for others. My growing understanding of *hanami* is a result of curiosity about global wisdom practices, researching the practice, along

with integrating it into my movements and yoga practice over these last springtimes. If this practice speaks to you I encourage you to find other sources from reading the poetry to talking to those who have experienced *hanami* first hand in Japan where this practice originated.

Early on in the practice of *hanami*, there was more a focus on the watching of plum (*ume*) blossoms which tend to blossom earlier after a winter, which eventually shifted to emphasize the watching of cherry (*sakura*) blossoms. Once a practice of the wealthy it spread through Samurai culture and then to the general populace of Japan. Today people in Japan gather for picnics and other ways to come together to watch and celebrate the blossoming of the cherry trees over their short period of existence. The Japanese Meteorological Agency even produces an annual cherry blossom forecast map to predict their blooming. Here, we tend to travel around our local streets surprised again and again by a newly blooming line of trees.

The ‘why’ of *hanami* is complex, but may be said to enact a watching, listening and participating in the rhythms of the natural world. Of recognizing our interconnection with nature, and the ways it constantly gifts us, a reminder of beauty, change and the ephemerality of life – there and then gone. Reminding us perhaps to learn to be ‘in the moment,’ even as past and future fills our being. Also, a sense of renewal as dormant sleeping trees blossom again after a long winter.

Bringing this approach to my Yin yoga practice has felt so easeful as we spend minutes in stillness in each pose, watching sensation – watching the blossoming of our own experience, learning to work with our wonderful flowing minds and hearts. The reminder of *hanami* as one more way to come into the moment, learning to see our own inner beauty more fully perhaps, along with better learning how to be with change in life itself. And, while more time may be spent in a yin pose, in many of our yoga practices we are encouraged to drop into to ourselves with each breath and listen deeply thus offering us the opportunity to embrace the aliveness of blooming in each moment. Or, we might envision our entire practice session as a blossoming cycle itself – feeling the energy of formation, along with the brightness and colour of the cherry blossoms. Seeing the exquisite beauty in each moment, no matter what all is going on. Living each moment to the fullest. And then, feeling the ongoing change in life, fading away as we settle into *savasana*. Because the practice of *hanami*, as some would say of *savasana*, contains an inherent acknowledgement of the truth of dying as well. Knowing this as part of living, we can again step into our next moment, our next yoga practice, more fully appreciative of beauty to blossom once again, and again.

*Hanami* has stirred many to craft words and other forms of art as part of becoming human. So, a handful of quotes shared in class....

*A world of grief and pain  
flowers bloom –  
even then.*

*- Kobayashi Issa*

*She decides to make a list of things that make her happy. She writes 'plum blossom' at the top of a piece of paper. Then she stares at the paper, unable to think of anything else. Eventually it begins to get dark.*

*-Neil Gaiman, Endless Nights*

*Just as cherry, plum, peach and damson blossoms all possess their own unique qualities each person is unique. We cannot become someone else. The important thing is that we live true to ourselves and cause the great flower of our lives to blossom.*

*- Daisaku Ikeda*

*In the shade of the blossoms no one is a stranger.*

*-Kobayashi Issa*

So many ways into our yoga practice – coming to our mat; or perhaps going outside to sit and be present with a tree; or even stopping your vehicle, or pedalling, or moving feet as you come to a new street fully in some cycle of blooming. May the watching of blossoms over these next weeks provide an opportunity to come into the moment and remind you of what makes you happy, of our deep interconnectedness within the natural world.....of beauty in our ever changing world.