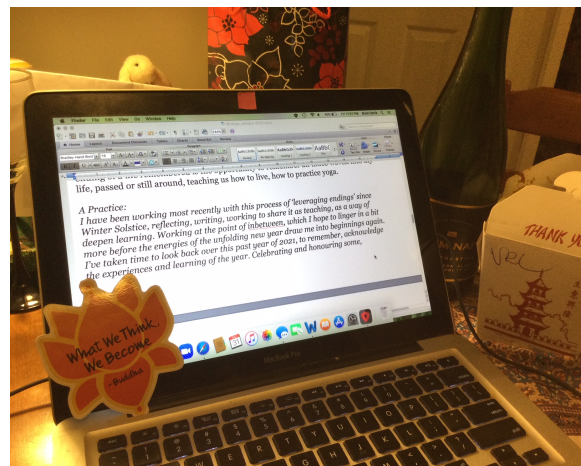


## Musings on Yoga: Endings

### January 2022

*Breathe in...long slow exhale...Repeat. Allow yourself to feel the space at the ending of the breath....the spaciousness, quiet, emptiness... before next action, of breathing. Feel the ending of each cycle of the breath, as you breathe in...as you breathe out...*

*December 31st....It is the evening and I am drawn to complete this writing of the last few days in the space between the breaths of the years transitioning from 2021 to 2022. I appreciate that while for some, it is New Years Eve and significant as a point of ending and beginning, there are many who will celebrate the years' change on a different date, be it *Hobiyee* or *Lunar New Year*, *Nowruz* or *Hijri New Year*. But whatever your connection to this New Year moment, I invite you to allow some sense of **endings**, *inbetweens* and beginnings to be part of your imagination in the moment. Feeling the shift of a Winter Solstice sun as light begins to lengthen into our days, and the turning of the calendar year.*



As I sit in this 'moment between' as the old year ends and new year beckons, I am noticing how easy it would be to simply move forward, look ahead and perhaps vision, flowing with the energy to create anew, to begin again. I can sense as well the deep cultural conditioning to charge ahead into the new beginnings, pushing aside or pushing through, choosing to ignore, and even fear the ending. Favouring the energies of the new, the novel...the future. Yet even in the leaning, I feel the need to explore the moment more deeply. Remembering my learning, shaped by yoga and other work, of the possibility for enriching understanding and becoming existent in the ending point as it shifts to the *inbetween*. Knowing too, that there are concrete skills that we might develop and use to strategically engage with, or 'leverage' this energy within the many endings of our lives. Working at the level of the body, fluctuations of our emotions or wanderings of the mind. Energy contained within the ending of this year; in the ending of a life of someone who has touched our lives; or in the finishing of a long held yin yoga pose, or everyday yoga practice. There is potential and power in learning to work at the point of ending, the point of *inbetween* before beginning anew. Just as there is 'something...' at the end of the exhale.

In each asana or posture we enter, we sustain and we end, be it the practice of yang or yin. And while possible in any lineage, there is something in a practice slowed down, as

in Yin Yoga that can support us in deepening our capacity to engage with the energies of creating, maintaining and ending. Settling in to a yin pose, we still, we soften, shift awareness to observation...without judgement. Noticing. Holding kindness and compassion, even love for ourselves not always knowing what might bubble up; be it spaciousness, or peace, emotional waves, patterns of thinking, or even stories. And then, we stay awhile....for minutes. Opportunity exists to grow skills of mindfulness of various lineages. Finally moving towards **ending**, slowly withdrawing from our pose letting the tenderness of our body and being shape the movement. Perhaps finding some small movements at times. And then, creating opening for “rebound”, or reverberation after the exquisite tension of a long held pose then released. Providing space for the stressed connective tissues to recover a bit, rebound and rehydrate before applying more stress. Time to further develop our capacity to observe stirred reflections and stay present. Appreciating that some gem of connection, clarity or insight may bubble up into our awareness. Allowing for the possibility of deepening mind-body-spirit connection. Expanding our skill in the ending of a pose.

As I sit in this exploration of endings I feel as well the reverberations of those around me who have died recently, reminding me of how the ‘ending’ that is dying is also a practice of living yoga, living life. Even to how we tend to finish practice with the pose described in the 15<sup>th</sup> century Hatha Yoga Pradikpika - “laying down on the ground, like a corpse, is called Śava (*death*) -āsana (*pose*)”. Appreciating that savasana is a pose of working with the *inbetween* our time of practice and our daily lives. Used as well at times between poses in restorative and yin practices, or in grounding ourselves for Yoga Nidra, or even as a whole one pose practice of its own. Reminding me that there are lessons within this practice that I can use to be more fully with those that have passed; to acknowledge, perhaps celebrate, integrate or let go.

**Endings**...the *inbetween*...my yoga....moves me to acknowledge, celebrate and share the work of a teacher, important to so many in the world - bell hooks who died this past December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Gloria Jean Watkins, using the pen name bell hooks has contributed so much to shaping our dialogue and right actions in working to transform systemic patriarchy and racism, illustrating so importantly *how they interact together* to accentuate discrimination and prejudice - what we call ‘intersectionality’. She spoke with fierce intelligence, woven with love. I once discovered an article in a recycling bin where I was teaching in which bell hooks conversed with the Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh discussing the usefulness of mindfulness practices in this work of social justice. It was a connection that I hadn’t really considered at the time, but have seen expand into our awareness and practice over these last years. She was a prolific writer, and storyteller for change. Some of her writings that influenced me (and as I reflect on them appreciate many of my own gaps of learning to be worked on) include; Teaching to Transgress, Feminism is for Everyone, All about Love, The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity and Love, Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope. She has touched many throughout the world, offering words and thoughts in an accessible way. I encourage you to explore her work, perhaps getting a taste of how she touched the world through words of her passing.

<https://www.lionsroar.com/bell-hooks-renowned-feminist-author-and-activist-dies-at-69/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/dec/15/bell-hooks-best-quotes-feminism-race>

And while some remembering of those who have powerfully touched many in the world recently passed, bell hooks, Desmond Tutu, E.O. Wilson, is important, there are always those whose lives were beautiful within their small circles teaching us, reminding us of the importance of mermaids and storytelling in the world. The ending of a life remembered is the opportunity to remember all those woven into the tapestry of our lives, passed or still around, teaching us how to live, how to practice yoga.

#### *A Practice*

*I have been working with this process of 'leveraging **endings**' since Winter Solstice, reflecting, writing, working to share it as teaching, as a way of deepen my learning. Working at the point of inbetween, which I hope to linger in a bit more before the energies of the unfolding new year draw me into beginnings again. I've taken time to look back over this past year of 2021, to remember, acknowledge the experiences and learning of the year. Celebrating and honouring some, embracing the learning of some not so pleasant but still important. Noticing what arises in body, and emotion and thoughts. Gleaning lessons learned or reinforced, deepening understandings, or new realizations. Identifying what I may let go of, as the trees let go their leaves for the winter. Engaging in the vulnerability of bare limbs, opening to the winter's darkness. Appreciating as well, that the past is now done, and we are in the space of this moment even if the past continues to reverberate through me. Cultivating for a time a pause, without needing to immediately jump forward into the future. I invite you to take some time to look back from this place of inbetween - to consider, reflect, acknowledge, accept and let go, as you begin again in the new calendar year, as the light lengthens into our days. Playing with the entwined weavings of light and dark, so much a part of this time of winter.*

In closing, as you encounter your **endings**, be it the transition of year, passing of a life dear to you, or the ending of your next yoga pose or practice, I invite you to focus a bit more on the *ending/inbetween*, seeing what you might do to 'leverage the learning'. There is so much beautiful power and potential at the end of the exhale, so worth engaging with, noticing. Create a space to look back; reflecting, exploring, acknowledging, integrating or letting go, settling into the now, as we lean into next steps on our path. Be present with what arises. As you move forward into winter, whether you are drawn to the deep, mindful, slowness of yin yoga or the exuberant heat of vinyasa, both, or some balancing blend, or another of the many systems of yoga I encourage you to find your mat, your teacher/s, your practice/s, engaging with the energy of the endings in your life.

in weaving,  
*brad*

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*I am grateful to be able to live and share this ancient and evolving practice of yoga on the traditional territories of the ɫəkwəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt Nations) Peoples.*