

Mind's scribbles

By Martina Čermáková

At a daylong retreat at the Kripalu Center in 1990, after seven years of doing yoga, longtime practitioner and teacher Danna Faulds tasted free writing—without editing or stopping. Instructed to write first "This is what I have to say to you", Faulds found herself amazed at what flowed from her pen.

"It was prose, but in a voice so very different than my usual self-talk," Faulds recalls. "This voice was compassionate, wise, connected, and authentic."

She wrote regularly from then, publishing five books of yoga-inspired poetry. She'd never planned to write verse. The words, she says, assumed a life of their own.

The symbiosis of yoga and writing feels natural. Writing, like yoga, imbues life with meaning, says Leza Lowitz, writer and owner of Tokyo's Sun and Moon Yoga Studio. "The grail of poetry, of writing, is self-knowledge. This is true of yoga, too. "

In writing and yoga practice, we immerse ourselves in inner listening and, Faulds says, become more willing to go with the moment. "Yoga takes that flow into physical movement, and poetry brings the flow into words," she says. "Both arise from a connection with the vast and formless realm of infinite silence. When I am doing inner-directed yoga that comes from the depths of me, it feels very similar to writing a poem. It takes the same kind of surrender, the same getting out of my own way."

Lowitz and Faulds say yoga has enriched their writing by allowing them to slow down and tap into personal stillness, the space between the breaths—to explore consciousness's fertile unrevealed depths. Yoga and writing feed both ways. Adding writing to asana and meditation links the relaxed and creative state that comes with practice to everyday life.

Faulds keeps a notebook and pen next to her mat to capture otherwise fleeting sensations, moments of connection, without losing flow.

"Some years ago, I was having a difficult time in my morning practice," she recalls. "My body hurt, my mind was all over the map, nothing came easily—not even the postures I really liked. I started to judge myself. By now I should be more flexible. Yoga should be a flowing, easy experience. Out of nowhere, in the midst of my practice, I got the first line of the following poem."

With the last line, Faulds realized the message transcended the yoga mat. The words that made her conscious of how she'd judged herself enabled her to change the way she approached being present with experiences. Struggles became encounters she could learn from, be changed by and let go into.

"The line 'this is breathing into life' came back to me again and again over the weeks after I wrote the poem, and helped me to breathe when I was in uncomfortable situations," she says.

Lowitz, for her part, released stifled emotions and memories through yoga, unsealing channels of creativity. She's become more productive since starting her practice in 1994. "The experience of working in a yoga pose, doing it over and over and over again to find alignment and release, helped

me see that the same process in writing was not a failure but a necessary and important part of creativity," she says. "I came to accept the axiom that 99% of good writing is revision."

Stretching and twisting, breathing and calming her mind and body, she discovered places that were very stiff, but also reserves teeming with strength, stamina and grace. "And, one day, a funny thing happened," she says. "As I was dangling in Downward-Facing Dog, the line of a poem came to me: 'Within my body, there's a city.' During my practice, the muse would speak to me and other lines would come."

Exploring the relationship of writing and yoga:

Faulds advises to bring a notebook and pen with you on your mat. At the end of hatha yoga, or at the end of meditation, write a trigger phrase such as "Right now, this is what I know is true" or "I am aware of" or "Today I am here to ... " or "This is what I have to say to you."

Then let the words flow onto the page without editing, without worrying about spelling or grammar, or even if the words make sense. Try writing a little faster than the mind can keep up with. Write for five minutes, or until you feel complete, and then read over what you've written. If there is one key phrase that leaps out at you write it on a slip of paper and put it in your pocket. Read it a few times as you go through your day—a tangible reminder and link with that relaxed and creative state you felt as you finished your practice.