

LIFE BODY & SOUL



Yogamama Says *Kathleen Thompson*

The Incredible Lightness of Penance

I still feel a bit sore in my body today because last Friday I did a weight workout with Tim.

I resist resistance training. I don't like weights. They smell funny, and they're heavy, and I hate the counting and the shaking and the grunting and the dropping. It feels like slavery. It feels like I should be wearing a striped jumpsuit and have a ball and chain attached to my ankle.

There is something about this whole weight-training scene that is a total turn-off. And this is what I told Tim.

Yet, I know there is the potential for realizing new things about myself in this activity. I just need "a way in."

A door.

An introduction.

Weight lifting and I have gotten off on the wrong foot. We've met under less than ideal circumstances.

In a doctor's office.

The Dr. said, "Hey, your bone density test shows you have osteopenia. Your bones are becoming porous.

The Dr. said, "I want you to take X, Y, and Z drugs."

I said (nicely), "No."

(I did *not* say, "Go to hell," which is what I wanted to say.)

Instead I said, "I'll just do more weight bearing exercises and try to build my bones up that way."

The Dr. said, "Suit yourself. I have said my piece."

"Fine," I said.

"Fine," she said.

So I picked up the weights. They were heavy, and they smelled like a cross between the dentist and high school shop class, and it was hate at first sight. I hated the look of them, the smell of them, but mostly the heaviness of them.

They reminded me of burdens. All burdens. They represented to me every psychological and physical burden I have ever tried to carry. And most of all, they reminded me that I was betraying my life's central mantra, which is: "If it's

not fun, it's not done."

These weights were calling me out. They were saying, in effect: "Hey, whatever happened to your mantra? Did you forget? Don't you subscribe to that anymore? Are you going back to that old Catholic "penance" paradigm? Don't tell me we have to do *that* trip again! I'm so tired of penance! Enough. Put down those weights, and go do some vinyasa flow yoga. This penance stuff isn't your scene anymore."

So I did. I put down the weights and went back to the familiar and the known and the safe.

But all the while I knew that I had to challenge myself, or "churn," as Yoganand, my yoga teacher, always says.

"Because the universe is vibrating way up here (he holds his hand way above his head) and we vibrate way down here (hand practically on the floor), if we want to live fully alive—you do want that, right?" I nod. "Then you've got to churn. You've got to break out of your comfy (slow) energy pattern and boost yourself into a new energy level. Like a rocket has to boost itself out of the atmosphere into the stratosphere and beyond. And to do that you've got to challenge your edge, banish your inertia. You've got to churn yourself."

There's a yogic way to do that, of course. You hold difficult postures for a long time and breathe like a mother.

And then there are ways that involve lifting heavy things and moving them around: logs, pianos, beds, topsoil, your grandmother. Or weights at the gym. It's not penance, it's "a challenge."

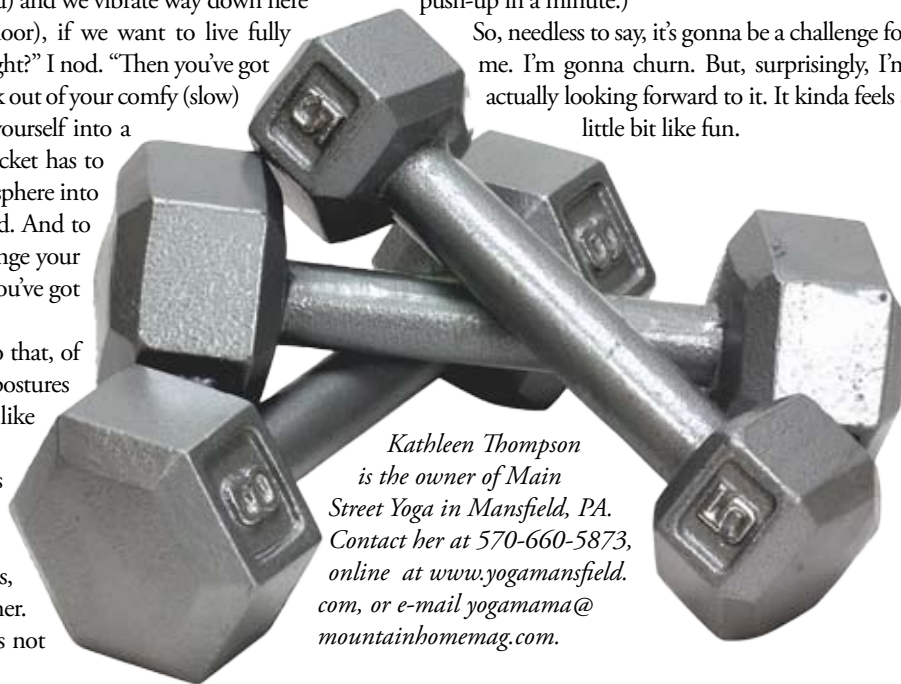
So that's what brought me to the gym with Tim. Because he's so happy, and he smiles all the time, and he thinks feeling strong is a kick, and fun. And he likes to play. He's lighthearted, and he's not into penance. He's into fun.

So we played with the weights. We played follow-the-leader (with barbells on our shoulders). We jumped up and down and twirled around in between. During that part I remembered old jump rope rhymes and started chanting them.

We sweated. We laughed. I said, "Oh my God, you've got to be *kidding* me!" a lot (mostly to myself).

He said: "I want you to be able to do thirty push-ups in a minute by the end of a month." (I can now do one whole push-up in a minute.)

So, needless to say, it's gonna be a challenge for me. I'm gonna churn. But, surprisingly, I'm actually looking forward to it. It kinda feels a little bit like fun.



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