

Yoga Helped Me Master the Art of Sucking at Snowboarding

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I should have known when I swiped right that eventually I'd be in trouble. And sure enough, five months into a relationship with someone passionate enough about skiing to include a photo of it on his dating profile, I was headed to the slopes. It's not that I'm snow-averse, but I've identified almost exclusively as an "indoors kid" my whole life, which may partially explain my predilection for yoga. Discovering the practice 20 years ago opened up a new world and showed me that I (forever picked last in gym class) could actually tap into some form of athleticism (in my living room!) and even enjoy it. By the time I completed my 200-hour teacher training in 2017, I felt like I'd found a stable home base for my body and brain that helped heal years of disordered eating, body dysmorphia, and athletic insecurities.

Three years later, I rented a snowboard. It seemed like a safe enough compromise at first: My partner would ski with his friends, and I'd invest in three days of snowboarding lessons. I was scared and apprehensive, but some small piece of me felt a jolt of excitement, even hope, as we geared up. After all, yoga had not only helped me hold Planks and never-ending Chair Poses, but it had taught me patience, self-compassion, and humility. Right?

In the Instagram-perfect version of this scenario, yes—my yoga practice would have emboldened me to take a risk with grace. In reality, I moved through the motions of my 15-minute flow the morning of my first lesson and very likely forgot to breathe, let alone integrate any wisdom.

Day one of my beginner's package was awkward and uncomfortable. It turns out strapping two feet into a single slab of fiberglass-reinforced wood in the middle of a slippery hailstorm does not immediately instill confidence and poise. By day two I was unleashing expletives on a child-ridden bunny slope as I watched my lesson mates execute the left-to-right swooping of the "falling leaf" maneuver with elegance. The third day was frustrating and disheartening as fatigue set in and my aching muscles overtook any mental determination that had remained. I didn't get it. I hadn't necessarily expected to master snowboarding in 72 hours, but I wasn't prepared to be this terrible (and in this much pain). I watched with envy as other beginners seemingly

advanced at warp speed, picking up new tricks while I continued to bury my bruised butt deeper into the numbing relief of the knee-deep snow. My partner and I had been meeting up for daily post-lesson lunch breaks to refuel and debrief, and that day, I was over it.

"Don't you remember what it was like to be really bad at something...and then keep doing it?" he asked in a valiant attempt to boost my bitter mood. "Remember when you started yoga?" It was a simple question that shifted my focus away from the pain of my backside. I'd never thought about being "bad" or "good" at yoga. I just *did* yoga. After 20 years, I still showed up on my mat feeling uncertain, imbalanced, and weak more often than I showed up feeling confident, capable, and in control. But I kept showing up. And maybe that's what I was forgetting out on the bunny slope: I wasn't vying for a spot in the X Games, I was trying to explore something new and discover pieces of myself in the process. I was trying to apply all those years of *yamas* and *niyamas* and yogic philosophy to a real-world challenge and, well, I wasn't trying very hard.

Rather than drive back to the cabin and launch butt-first into the hot tub as planned, I took my first ski lift up the mountain with my partner. My fear of flying headfirst into a tree somehow eclipsed my fear of heights as our chair crept up the mountain at nearly 1,000 feet above the trees. And to be perfectly honest, I fell most of the way back down. But remembering to breathe and observe and even laugh at myself helped turn the challenge into a more meditative experience than I expected. Being forced out of my own repetitive mental hamster wheel of negative thoughts brought me back to my breath as I had to assess and navigate the slick, snow-covered terrain in front of me. The chill on my face and the winter sun on my back pulled me into the present moment and, for stretches of time, helped remind me that whatever was happening right that second—no matter how clumsy or uncoordinated—was where my focus and energy needed to be. And I remembered to give myself credit for just showing up, the same way I show up on my yoga mat, even on the mornings my legs won't straighten: like the day after going snowboarding.