

# Take the risk be prepared to fall

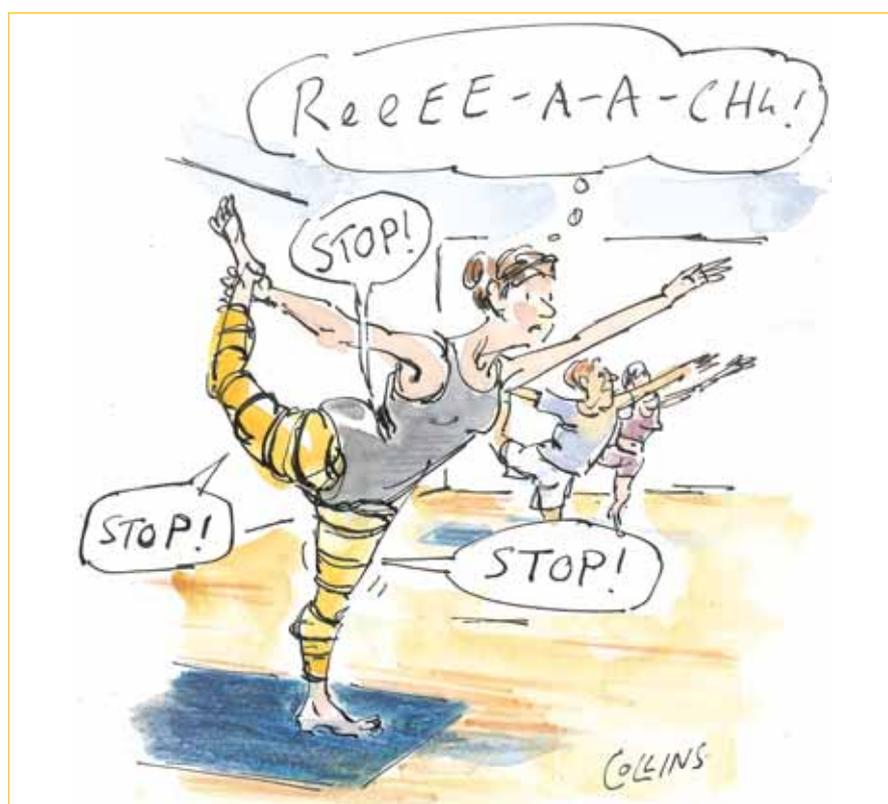
Adele Barlow challenges our risk-taking perspectives, emphasising that the greatest risk is not what we do, but what we fail to attempt. As Mark Twain wrote many years ago, "Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did."

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As people trickle into the studio, the men unfolding their mats and the ladies fixing their hair, I look around and start to wonder why people come to yoga. For the tittering forty-year-old housewives, maybe it is Tim, the svelte, green-eyed blonde warming up in the front row. For the pale businessmen with hairy, zebra-like potbellies, maybe it's the doctor's orders.

For myself, yoga, like most internalised pursuits, is no longer a choice. Somewhere between a morning coffee and an afternoon pick-me-up, yoga forces me to escape from my schedule long enough to really take a breath. As much as I enjoy it, there are times when I stand with my nose at my knees and question my own reasons for masquerading my body as a noodle. Usually, it's before the class has started. Then, in steps our teacher Dagmar to remind us why we're here. She soothingly instructs us during Standing Bow Pose: "Now, everyone, stretch as far as you can. Really push yourself, so that if you're going to fall, you fall forward."

Standing Bow Pose (also known as Dancer Pose) encapsulates a hundred



clichés. Namely those involving harboured ships being safe, but not fulfilling their purpose. It involves intense focus while pulling your foot behind your head as you reach your other arm in front. According to Dagmar, the risk is not that you might fall over, it is that you may allow that fear of falling to distract you

from fully experiencing the healing powers of the pose.

Most beginners who try Standing Bow Pose never stretch themselves far enough to fall because they are afraid to look stupid in front of the class. Who can blame them for not wanting to make mistakes besides Dagmar? If risks are

the sky-dives, mistakes are the broken parachutes. They are shoved under the carpet, excluded from the mental autobiography, and giggled about at the 21st birthday party. They are associated with pain, but pain is a prerequisite of growth. Biology proves it – torn muscles and broken bones heal to form newfound resilience. Luckily, yoga is the kind of physical activity where these events only occur as metaphors.

Dagmar is the kind of teacher who brings metaphors into the studio in a way that you only notice when you're looking out for them. Her approach to yoga challenges why we waste so much time worrying about making a fool of ourselves. Since when did we forget that the greatest risk is nothing we do, but what we fail to attempt?

It is easier to fail a meaningless course than to invest effort into a meaningful one. The worst mistakes are the goals you were too scared to work towards. In our personal life, it stings sharper to lose what never existed, to look back on conversations you never started, and affection you never shared. The worst

guilt stems from failing to be the person that you know deep inside you could have been. Courage is not about beating yourself up for risks gone wrong; it's about holding yourself accountable for retreat from battles you could have won.

Economists preach that greater risk leads to greater reward. Memory reveals that the greater the risk not taken, the greater the eventual regret. In any event, the greater the mistake, the greater the lesson. A subscription to fate, the belief that nothing occurs by accident, is a potent psychological antibiotic. Every person we meet, every episode enjoyed or endured, then finds its link upon a larger map. When the fabric breaks and predictions veer into nothingness, whatever happened still happened for a reason. That reason may simply be invisible to our preconceptions.

There is no such thing as wasted experience, even when it feels like time has been fruitlessly spent on dead-end pursuits. In careers, in love, in families, in friendships – there will always be mess and mistakes along the way. It can take years for a person to realise that nothing

real can ever be perfect. The only way to thrive is to let yourself go, see what it feels like, and learn from the experience, knowing that anything worth mastering is a matter of trial and error. To venture out of a comfort zone is a question, and questions are a request for information, even if they fail to deliver the answers originally hoped for.

Standing Bow Pose asks the ultimate question to everyone, from the Lycra-clad yoga goddesses in the front row, to the self-conscious newbies at the back. Regardless of experience levels, everyone can fall. The only way to fall forward is through transcendence of the ego. The question is not what you are willing to risk, but how much you are willing to let yourself regret, by failing to take the leap.

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