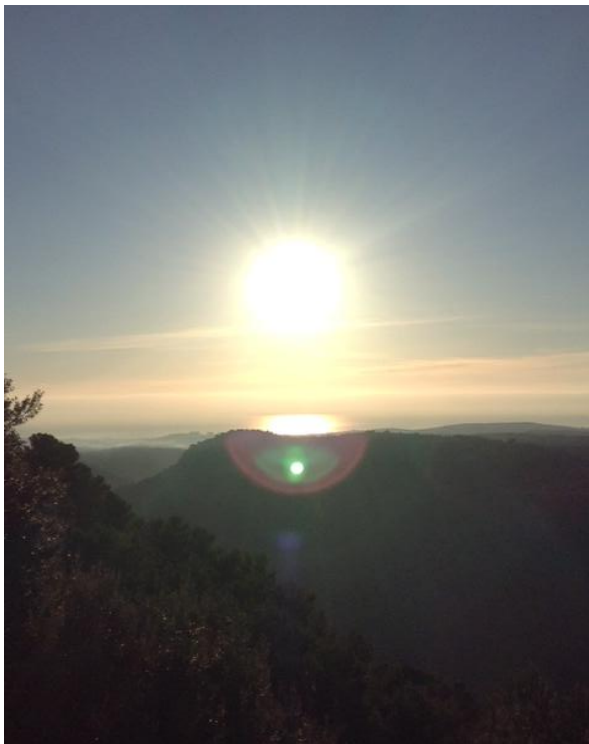


Part 3: Looking at Me

When I attended the LUXYOGA Vinyasa Retreat in 2012, I got up about an hour or two before class every day to journal, eat breakfast and look at the sun over Nice from the villa's balcony. It was my favorite time of day during the trip, pleasantly quiet and a chance to gather my thoughts and sink in to my environment. When I decided to go to the Resolution Retreat I was looking forward to getting up early to live that experience again. This time around, I woke up about 90 minutes before class to eat and journal. Breakfast featured



homemade granola, hard boiled eggs, croissants, French bread, yogurt and a chia pudding dish. A few of the guests were already eating at the kitchen table, and I sat at the kitchen table as well. I filled up on carbs, particularly the granola and ate two eggs and a croissant. After I finished my breakfast, I sat outside on the balcony overlooking the forests of the alps and Nice farther away. The sun was set high and bright over the water, making it sparkle beautifully. I took a few pictures to save the view and savored some thoughts about being happy in this place I was at the last retreat. I'd always wanted to be there in that morning again, and even if it was just for a short while, it was an intention fulfilled. Yet the sun would be leaving me soon, as it was getting close to class time.



When I started thinking more about the upcoming class and pictures, some nerves set in, as well as the realization I may have had too much to eat before class. I drank some chamomile tea for digestion, but I still sensed heaviness in my stomach that wasn't going to go away in 30 minutes. What could be worse than eating too much before a Bikram Yoga class and having pictures of my postures taken too? I could either stress and worry about how I'd look in my pictures, or make the most of what I could give myself. I decided to give myself all I could, knowing it might not be my best practice.

The first class of the day couldn't have ended fast enough. From pranayama, the first breathing exercise, to kapalbhati, the last breathing exercise, I was sick in the stomach. I

could hardly suck my stomach in for any postures, and the floor exercises were uncomfortable to say the least. I was also aware of one of the LUXYOGA staff members who was taking pictures during the class. I

Practice from the Heart Part 3 – The Sails Within

wanted to look as good as possible for the camera, but with my stomach too full, I had to let go of any ambitions of being photogenic. It wasn't my worst experience as far as eating too much before a Bikram class, but a few times I could feel some undigested food trying to make its way up my stomach and out of my mouth before I swallowed it back down. I heard the usual corrections from Ben to tighten my thighs, which was about the only correction I could make. I've written an article before about the importance of core strength and how taking care of our core takes care of everything in our lives. My class that day was an example of how uncomfortable it can be when we don't take care of our core. It's not just about feeling sick, but our yoga practice suffers too. Even though the class wasn't so great, and I was dreading the pictures the group was going to see in the afternoon, I gave myself more self-love and appreciation than in the first class of the retreat. We've all had the experience of eating too much or eating the wrong thing before a vigorous exercise. It happens.



Before our second class of the day, we had a lunch buffet that included poached eggs, grilled chicken, a cauliflower mash, soup roasted tomatoes and mache lettuce. Then we spent time in the villa den looking at the first half of the pictures from class. The purpose of the picture session was for us to have a visual idea of how we were expressing our postures. Since we typically depend on a teacher to observe and correct what we're doing, the session was a chance for us to see what Ben was talking about when he gave corrections. In these sessions, sometimes we may surprise ourselves of how well our standing bow looks or come to back to reality that our backward bend isn't as deep as we thought. It's also a chance to receive more suggestions that we might not have received in class.



I wanted to look away from my pictures, knowing I had eaten too much before the first class. It showed in some of the pictures by way of my protruding stomach, making it harder to sit through the first photo session. I was content with my backward bend, and I knew Ben would tell me to suck my stomach in more the next time around. Hearing that comment and seeing it in my postures were easy to understand. What I didn't realize until I saw my pictures was I wasn't tightening my thighs as much as I needed to, particularly in standing head to knee and standing bow. Ben pointed it out to me, and I could see it by my bended legs in the picture.

Practice from the Heart Part 3 – The Sails Within

I thought my legs were straight when I practiced, but that wasn't the case. I also saw a picture of the second part of my wind-removing pose. I'd never seen that view before and was surprised how uneven my hips were, especially in a posture like that. But pictures don't lie.

We got through half of the photos before it was time for the second class. It was only the third class of the retreat, but this time, Ben's corrections were easier for me to incorporate, and I felt much stronger and lighter from the first class. Granted I also hadn't eaten too much this time around, but I could actually feel the difference of really tightening my thighs and how much easier it was for me to balance in standing head to knee and standing bow. I could suck my stomach in much easier too.

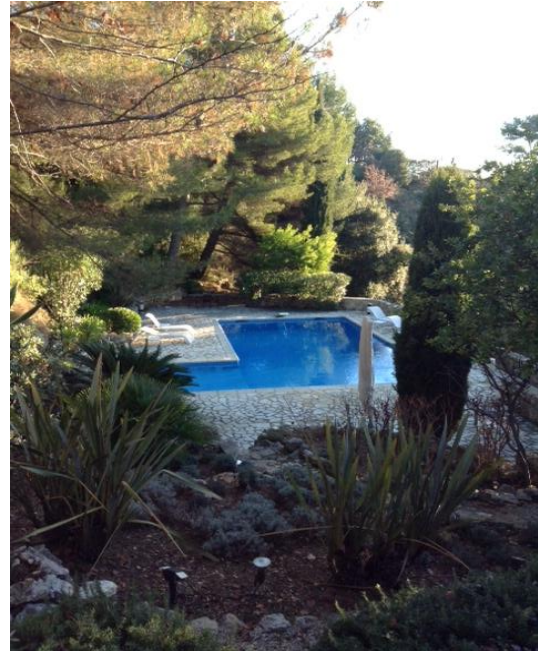
As the standing series was ending I felt inner joy that class was making sense, and I was making progress. I thought to myself, this is why I came to LUXYOGA. The first few classes were difficult, and it seemed there were so many things to learn to get every posture right. Then, everything started to make sense. My body was stronger, my mind clearer, and those self-defeating thoughts faded into being at ease with myself. In savasana, the good feeling was rising out of my body and looking at myself like an observer, aware, clear and present. For all the things different coming in to this retreat, I came back to LUXYOGA because I always managed to find my inner peace and higher self.

Things happen for a reason, and sometimes we make choices not realizing subconsciously it's for a lesson. I wanted to go back to LUXYOGA for a number of reasons on the surface, like improving my yoga practice and making new friends, but this trip brought me more than that. From Ben's exercise at the



beginning of the trip, this retreat was about practicing and living from the heart. It was about being aware of my old stories I bought and sold to myself that didn't serve me and instead bringing awareness and light to the great qualities I had. This retreat was also about making the most of a situation in unexpected circumstances, like Craig's absence and the plane delays, as well as relishing being the "listener," in conversations, as opposed to having the need to express myself verbally all the time.

During pranayama breathing, Ben would tell us to inhale "so" and exhale "hum," which was a meditation my nutritionist had recommended to me literally days before the retreat as a way to eliminate the duality of what messages my mind was sending me and what messages my



Practice from the Heart Part 3 – The Sails Within

heart was sending me. I knew these instances weren't a coincidence, but something I needed to be reminded of. The mind and the heart must be one, not just for a fulfilling yoga practice, but for a fulfilling life.

At the end of the second night I got to know one of the guests from France. He'd been a flight attendant for 10 years, and was planning to go to the Bikram teacher training in the spring. Even though he'd only been practicing Bikram Yoga for a year, he fell in love with the practice and how it changed him physically and mentally. This was the third person I knew who attended a LUXYOGA retreat and went to training shortly afterwards. There's an energy these retreats create that inspire people to want to teach, and it was the same case for me, only my training would be a different style of yoga.

Given his flight attendant background, the Frenchman had also visited several cities from around the world, including New York City, his favorite city and where he would like to live. I also found out he had lived in one of my favorite cities, Barcelona, for three years. We talked a lot about travel to the point where it seemed we should've been living in different places: him in New York and me in Barcelona. The only thing in the way was the right work or visa. I hope we both get what we want this year, and we cross paths again. I still keep in touch with several people I've met on past LUXYOGA retreats, and I knew this retreat would be no different after the people I'd met. I just wish my time in France wasn't passing so quickly.

