

# Step Up

*I just take one step closer to you. And even when I've fallen down, my heart says follow through.*

~ONE STEP CLOSER TO YOU, MICHAEL FRANTI & SPEARHEAD

*Step to the top of your mats.*

This is what the instructor says at the beginning of most every yoga class.

I hear this so much that it's automatic to simply step to the top when I'm told. I can be finishing a conversation, coming up from a seat or coming down from a stretch. It doesn't matter. Everything stops, my mind clears, and I step to the top.

But last week I heard something else.

*Step to the top of your mats*, the instructor announced.

And when I did so, my mind, on its own accord, suddenly responded in silence, *Reporting for duty!*

I've never really had a thought surprise me. I usually know what I'm thinking about. But on that day my response was as automatic as my step to the top. And even though no one could hear my mind speak out, everyone else reported for duty, too.

If you asked me, I'd answer aloud that I practice yoga to stay in shape, the kind of shape that takes all forms. The practice helps keep me fit physically, mentally and spiritually.

But now I know there is another reason. It's the reason my mind stated, even though that in itself sort of makes me question the state of my mind! Truly, though, practicing has now become my duty, to myself and to those I find around me.

Going to yoga is how I have my own back. It's a vote of confidence in me, by me. It's how I let myself know that I'm worth maintaining, that my body, my mind and my spirit are all worthwhile.

So I'm proud to report for duty, almost daily, because with each day I'm able to see how far I've come in caring for myself.

I took a big detour for a generous portion of my life, throwing the care of my body, mind and spirit off course. Somehow, I let someone other than me navigate, and it's been a very long road back.

Every step to the top of the mat is another step back on track.

The next day comes, and I report for duty as usual. It is a Monday following a long holiday weekend, and I had been uncharacteristically tired for days. The weekend had a strange pace as I practiced and slept and practiced and slept.

At the end of the week's first workday, I stop home to eat and change out of my work clothes. Continuing my weekend pattern, I set the alarm for a 45-minute snooze and fall into a deep sleep before leaving the house.

The following is an excerpt from Anne's book, [Unfold Your Mat, Unfold Yourself](#).

The evening class is crowded, and there's only one space left for the instructor. The room is hot from the previous class, and the instructor opens the windows to invite in the setting sun and the summer breeze.

*Step to the top of your mats,* he says.

I automatically take the step, and we're told to place our feet wider than usual and bring our hands to our hearts. We are asked to set an intention or say a prayer or think of anything meaningful.

Every time we're asked to do this, a million things run through my mind, as if I have to figure out something quickly in this very brief moment. Should I bless my children? Should I send good thoughts to someone? Should I say a prayer? Should I, should I, should I?

This night, I decide to send my thoughts to me, which I don't usually do. And, once again, I hear my mind speak on its own accord, this time simply saying the word, *Love*.

And then we're told that we're going to start slowly, and we follow the instructor's motions as he raises his hands to the ceiling before bringing them back to his heart.

I press my hands together and follow them with my eyes, up and overhead, just in time to see a dozen rainbow polka dots splashed across the ceiling, a picture the setting sun has made as it shines through a prism that hangs in the window.

The class moves along at what I find is an unusual pace of patience and power. Somehow the movements are big and small at the same time. We move carefully and slowly in a way that is powerful and strong. The instructor practices with us while telling us what to do, so we can listen and see at the same time.

Periodically, we are told to stop. After a flow, we are supposed to hold still. We are instructed to take Child's pose. Later, we are told to stay in Down Dog. Still later, we get to choose our stationary pose, and I go into a headstand where I can be still while upside down.

Each time I'm almost disappointed to stop. I want to keep flowing, and I'm not even aware that I need any sort of break until there is one. Only then do I realize how much effort I've put forth, and it's a welcome rest.

Once we're still the instructor gives an explanation for why, and the reason is an interesting mix of patience and power, just like the practice.

He says, *You work hard, and you rest hard. Work and rest. Work and rest. You give and give, and then you receive.*

And I realize, then, that this rest between flows is the same as the step to the top of the mat. It's a duty, too. It's what helps to strengthen the body, the mind and the spirit. It's the decision to receive after giving so much.

At the end of the practice we are asked to bring to mind the intention or prayer that we set at the beginning. I had almost forgotten but remember right away that mine was *Love*.

The practice ends, and I realize this love has already come to pass. Somehow the movements have fortified me, and I feel solid and worthwhile. I give the instructor a heartfelt hug and tease my friends that it's time to label the studio wall with our names because we'll be back before we know it.

We leave, and I walk to the grocery next door with a friend and hug her, too, telling her I'm honored to know her and love her, too.

And then I turn to shop and see that I'm standing among all the brightly colored fruits and vegetables, their colors a rainbow splashed in front of me like those on the studio ceiling earlier that evening.

And I want to buy them all because my prayer and my practice worked.

But it's very close to the time to make my way home, because I have to report for duty again tomorrow. So I remember, instead, the mix of patience and power, and I buy just the few things I need, along with a treat or two for *Love*.