

It starts before my alarm goes off. My eyes open, focus on the wall where the morning sun streams in the window. My thoughts begin coming, rapid-fire—*fuck, it's too early to be awake. I'm sore as hell and don't want to move. Why didn't anyone warn me how brutal yoga school could be?* A steady stream of thoughts chug into my mind, one after another at increasing speed. *What am I doing in New York, anyway? What classes are today? Is it the weekend yet?* My cell phone alarm sounds its fake rooster sounds to herald the new day. *Fuck, I think, hitting the snooze button.* *Freight Train Brain.*

I walk out of my bedroom, step into the bright kitchen of my ashram apartment. Outside, a small boat makes its way down the Erie Canal, past train tracks and a sign welcoming the reader to North Tonawanda, Niagara County—*2,656 miles from home*, I note sadly. *What's even going on in Portland?* I wonder, run through a thousand possibilities in my mind—Timbers hooligans rioting, gays wandering the rainy waterfront for Pride, Mt. Tabor erupting.

My roommate Serena steps out of her bedroom in a purple lululemon top and a sleepy grin. "Morning, sunshine," she says, walking into the kitchen with the purposeful swagger of a professional wrestler—appropriate, considering her time spent as a WWE Diva.

"Morning, darling. What's the lineup for today?"

She pours sweetener into a cup of coffee. "Nine a.m. practice, followed by yoga pos-

Freight Train Brain



remember to breathe

BY NICK MATTOS

It goes without saying that if you've ever thought about how badly you wanted a drink and then realized it was 10 a.m., you probably know a thing or two about Freight Train Brain.

ture clinic, then a Bhagavad Gita lecture, then a technical posture clinic, then another practice session, and then meditation. Oh, and then we study the postures that we cover tomorrow."

"Damn," I say, rubbing my eyes while I scan through my iTunes library. "It's like we're in yoga boot camp."

"Even worse," she says. "In boot camp, you just have to work out a bunch. We work out a bunch and then spend hours studying the theory behind it. Just don't think about it."

"Easier said than done," I reply, clicking on a song.

"Don't want to think too much, it makes me think too much, keeps my mind on my mind," Henry Rollins growls, speaking the truth. "It overloads me. I want to disconnect myself."

The Yoga Sutras—the texts upon which the practice of yoga is based—are concerned primarily with practices and philosophies that lead to "the cessation of the whirlings of the mind." When I first read this line, I gasped, stunned by the accuracy of the phrasing—the concise way it explained what was happening when my thoughts fired through my head as though shot by a semi-automatic weapon. I'm someone with a mind wired for whirling, someone who, like Rollins, gets overloaded to the point where I just want to disconnect myself.

The elevator door slides open and I jump inside, a yoga mat in one hand and a bag of anatomy textbooks in the other. The thoughts keep racing—*What if I got stuck in the elevator?* I check that my phone is in my pocket, check again. I, like many of those with minds prone to whirling, tend to think of lots of means to temporarily disconnect ourselves—*anxious rituals, obsessive fixations and good ol' fashioned chemical-induced numbness.* It goes without saying that if you've ever thought about how badly you wanted a drink and then realized it was 10 a.m., you probably know a

thing or two about Freight Train Brain.

I set down my bag and kick my shoes off at the door of the yoga studio, set them in a jumbled pile with the other students' footwear. I rush to the practice room and throw the door open, get hit in the face with a humid wall of heat. The Bikram yoga room is equal parts laboratory and torture chamber—105-degree heat, mirrors reflecting your sweaty face back at you unapologetically. *If you can find peace here*, I think to myself, already starting to sweat, *finding it in the rest of your life is a snap.*

I lie face up on my mat like the rest of the students, eyes closed, thoughts stampeding. *Okay, fine*, I declare inwardly as an experiment, *I call a truce. No rituals, no fixations, no numbness. You race*, I state to my mind, *and I'll watch.*

My chest rises and falls, beads of sweat forming. Outside, a train passes by, its whistle calling out for attention, rumbling past the building. I feel the floor vibrate with its passing, let it shake my body and be present in my ears without attaching to it, without aversion. The train passes away, the room still—I breathe, watch, smile. The instructor walks into the room. "Good morning, everyone," she says, the students sitting up to face her in unison. "Welcome to yoga." ☐

By the time you read this, NICK MATTOS will be a certified Bikram yoga instructor. Send Henry Rollins bootlegs to nickmattos@justout.com.

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