

The Yoga of Mountain Biking

I roared down the trail (I say “roared,” but, between you and me, I probably wasn’t going all that fast) trying to keep up with Laura in Tillamook State Forest. At one point, I was cursing her, the trail, my stupid egg beater pedals, and the dumb guy who passed us in a matching lycra outfit. Why had I ever let this sport endure for so long in my life? Then the trail got more technical. I couldn’t give the negative thoughts any airspace if I wanted to stay helmet-up. My world became intricate root systems, rock gardens, and hair pin turns. I had to trust that my wheels would clear obstacles both bulbous and jagged, precipitous and loose. The grip on my handlebars had to give my bike the freedom to jerk while still maintaining control. It was a matter of facilitating a jostling dance between rubber and earth.

Resting at a waterfall, it hit me: there are yogic qualities to mountain biking. “Yoga” simply can translate to “union.” Mostly, we associate yoga with the practice of asana, or postures. Yet yoga in broader terms refers to a nature in which the separateness between self and the universe is dissipated. Seamless consciousness. It is said that the correlating mental state is harmonious, even blissful. The practice of yoga asana invites this consciousness.

In some ways, so can mountain biking. Ego, mind chatter, and drama all fall away on the trail. A mountain biker becomes pure focus. Though physical reality may be chaotic and rocks may clang under wheel, riding clean lines through a technical portion of trail creates an inner quiet. The body becomes a synergetic fusion of muscle and intent, with balance and core strength stabilizing the show. It feels pretty darn unified.

Another commonality is determination. Both the mountain biker and yogini have to carve precious time and energy out of their busy days to get on the mat or go to the woods so they can test how far limits can be pushed and, subsequently, respect/accept limitations with grace. Progress is earned through salt rings on clothes and navigating one hundred mistakes to unfold one success. To a true rider, it’s not about fluffing around town with mountain bikes racked to the top of the car. Just like to a true yogini, it’s not about sticking a leg behind her head at parties. It boils down to dedication and love.

Maybe the gurus of old are rolling in their graves knowing that this comparison has been forged. After all, yoga is a spiritual path that aims to help people become their highest self. Could the same be said for mountain biking? I’m not so sure. I’ve dated one too many mountain biker to affirm that statement. But, I’m not discounting it either. If the wisdom learned in mountain biking spills over into how one lives their day to day life, I don’t doubt that some deeper sense of awareness would evolve. It’s possible. After all, it’s undeniable that a mountain biker craves the spirit of “union:” the unadulterated absorption in riding whatever the trail throws down.