

Shala Retreat Recap

-November 2017

A few weekends back, 15 of us from the shala converged on a ranch in Frazier Park to re-TREAT ourselves through asana, pranayama, chanting, meditation, sharing circles, 3-song dance parties, ayurvedic food, and impromptu bread pudding. I've always had an aversion to yoga retreats, perceiving them as escapist and profit-driven, but when enough members of our community expressed interest, I took the opportunity to create a container for us to deepen in practice and in relationship. The 'profits' that emerged were beyond expectation. We laughed, cooked, cried, danced, and forged connections that will surely strengthen the web of support we're co-creating at the shala. Ultimately, we indulged in love. After our time together, I invited written feedback. Here is some of what I received, along with photos that capture the authenticity of the weekend. This is YOGA.



I would like to thank you for the invitation to join you on this piece of the journey. I understand It might not look to you like I am ready to sign up with the Cirque du Soleil anytime soon (LOL) but I want you to know that I feel like a queen when I step onto my mat. This mat is my kingdom. It has become a place of new possibilities, a place of new dreams, a place of new beginnings every morning, a place to build upon, a place to laugh off the pains and aches of my poor body and to celebrate the beauty of my breath. In the sacred space of the mat I came to realize that my breath alone is enough to justify my existence. Thank you all for sharing space, light, food, laughter, tears, stories, ginger and lemon. And thank you for sharing God.



The overarching insight for me is yoga is prayer.



The retreat was a good reminder to slow down, and I walked away feeling confident that I will carry yoga with me wherever I go and that I should not fear losing this practice.



First, on the topic of radical self-acceptance, I've been thinking of how radical and unusual it is to be in the company of the others and feel completely accepted by them. That was almost an entirely new experience, and it's such a relief and a joy to know that the shala community can be that kind of refuge. I

think getting to spend time with everyone on the retreat really brought that to the forefront of my mind. Secondly, the retreat really opened my eyes, heart, and mind to the idea of yoga and practice as so much more than daily asana practice. Thirdly, I've found that the effects of the retreat continue to linger- I look for small moments of quiet and spiritual introspection more often- daily, I would say, and take more time to check in on myself.



I've learned that we have to surrender our internal battles and fears, to have gratitude for life with all its obstacles and to love unconditionally. I've also learned that the shala and particularly this group are very blessed and sacred to me.



I feel as though I want to make a great big long list here, but I'm going to resist the urge so that I can draw attention to one of the most meaningful insights/learnings for me right now. That is – to approach new ideas and new people from an open-minded and non-judgmental place.



The insights taken away from our time together are difficult to put into words. To note just a few: I was confronted by my patterned thinking yet felt grounded by the supportive energy of our retreat family; I felt more connected to my shala mates after learning that we each share many personal struggles in common; the retreat left me with my spirits uplifted, and inspired by the display of internal beauty of each of my shala mates.



I'm trying to excise some things from my life and fill them with the love and energy of this community. If I seem like I'm always on the verge of tears, it's because my heart is full. I feel so privileged to be in such an open and vulnerable place with all of you. The insights from our circles provided me with many tools to deal with my own suffering and also inspiration to find and cultivate my joy, especially through the practice of yoga and its lessons. The broadest learning that I will take away is to focus on being grounded, both on the mat and in my life. Rooting before I try to extend is how I will try to approach any kind of growth in my life. I learned so much during this retreat about the power of community. I've always thought of myself as an independent, powering through everything by myself, but hearing everyone share their pain, their deepest feelings, and their tools for surviving and thriving made me feel so supported in even the loneliest of my battles.



This retreat was an experiment in trust. Instead of charging a set price, I chose to play with my own edges by offering generously and welcoming contributions after the weekend was complete. This dance of giving and receiving allowed multiple forms of capital to flow through all of us, filling me with a new understanding of what it means to operate in a gift culture.

One of the questions I asked on our feedback form was how best I and the shala could support each student moving forward. This is one of the responses I was gifted:

Take good care of yourself. Trust the shala and the community to come forward and together as needed during the months of your final trimester and when you birth your beautiful family. Trust the shala will support you and give you energy and love. Trust us to step up. Take time for yourself in whatever ways make you smile. The work of holding space for and facilitating a retreat is beyond words in what it contributed to all of us, and even to the shala community members who did not attend. Allow yourself time to decompress and enjoy the fall season and winter as she comes. If I had to break that all down to two words – Smile and Trust. I believe the greatest gift you can give all of us is your happiness. Value your own happiness. I believe if you do this all the needs of the community members will be met.

This response, and our time together, are gifts I will cherish forever. The love that the shala family is encircling me and baby with is overwhelming. I sit in wonder at the power of breathing and moving together, of dancing in discomfort, of choosing to love, of renouncing and enjoying. I trust in this power. And I thank you all for being my teachers.

