

ON MYSORE BERLIN ONE YEAR EXPERIENCE AND OTHER RANTS

Yes, Mysore Berlin is closed. We had our last led class and community potluck in our now beautiful garden yesterday.

I have received so many requests for explaining the reasons that took me to close the program that I feel more than informal conversations with our present student community are needed.

You all probably know by now how uncomfortable I feel with formal and sensational, for me synonymous of artificial and unreal. So yes, many reasons but a lot has to do with the way this sacred practice is now being corrupted and promoted and how people are then educated to perceive it through the eyes of marketing and promotional tools. What often makes a program successful and financially viable nowadays in our present western Ashtanga yoga scenario? Nothing to do with the sacredness of the practice and the daily honest ground work required to be in a Mysore room day in and day out. Maybe little to do with commitment and devotion to the practice. It is unfortunately the willingness to run it as a business, promotions and marketing tools included (yes now also slowly but surely invading FB and Instagram under the cover of “sponsored”). It is creating sensation: events, week-end or week long workshops that fill up room as they require only a short term commitment. We indeed live in a short span attention environment, one of the main culprits obviously being social media slowly but surely educating us to consume fast. Videos, images, the quicker the better.

Apart from traveling and teaching in many different places in the last 10 years, I also taught and lived for twenty years in an international sustainable community in India, and am probably still trying to come to terms with the not only Western but German reality, and more specifically Berlin. I choose Berlin as it felt like the more progressive city now happening on this side of the world. Anything is possible in Berlin, and it is now probably one of the biggest hubs in the world. It is an informal community environment and this made it interesting to me. I had seen the failings of the community where I lived for so many years, and I was ready to experiment with a less rigid and still organically happening place as this. Living and working in Berlin means also being with people who have come here from all over the world, and some of them found their way to our shala. Roots are still everywhere, so a lot of coming and going is common within our Ashtanga community. As Berlin popularity grows, so grows its demand for living spaces, too.. It is a very well known fact that finding a place to rent now in Berlin can take months of search and tons of paper work. But yes, in the end we found our beautiful space and started off. A bit expensive, but that's how expensive is now Berlin becoming. The program has seen many beautiful students passing by, some were here until the end, many stayed only for a few days, weeks or months. Numbers were almost never enough to cover the high costs, and I would not buy into the event/workshop/subrenting space thing. Everybody knows by now how I value this practice as a very intimate experience that little has to do with what can be transmitted in a short “buy and consume” kind of short teaching experience environment. This is how we as teachers were taught to teach by our teachers in Mysore, although it is becoming less and less popular nowadays. The space I created wanted also to be a home for students, where one is free to stay on after class, make himself coffee, share and connect. Connection and belonging is what we all feel is often missing in a big city, and this is what Mysore Berlin also wanted to offer on top of a practice space. Many beautiful people understood this and were with us until the end, others kept hopping from place to place as it is customary here. In spite of Berlin being the German capital and its biggest city, Ashtanga yoga taught traditionally by authorized teachers was nonexistent here before I arrived, with the exception of an authorized teachers couple who was here for a few years then left just before I came. I was told they were able to create a strong community but in a very different scenario. Only a few years ago things were very different from now, so much more confusion as to what is an authentic practice and teaching has been brought about by tons of not authorized programs. Most of my student came from these environments here, and a lot of work had to be done to make everyone understand what it is to practice Mysore style. This is unlike any other big city in the world where ashtanga yoga has been taught now for long in less spurious ways and many know what it entails. A lot of work had to be put into educating students into what this practice entails when taught in its pure form, especially considering the many events and workshops that keep being

offered all around. It is so much easier to just commit for a week, for both student and teacher, get the hype of being in a "special" event happening, a few technique details and maybe some inspirational add on talks and pumps ups if you are lucky. It's all good but the magic and the real transformative qualities of this practice are often missing. They can only come when the student/teacher connection is maintained over a long time, and becomes a very intimate connection. A teacher might not know a lot of personal details about students' lives, but through what happens in their practice everyday and the attitude they bring to it a lot can be seen. This is where transformation happens, not unlike therapy. This is what this practice is about.

So yes, this was all happening at Mysore Berlin but after one year of believing in it and tons of money gone out of the window, its growth was still too slow and irregular to keep making it viable. Maybe in another 2 or 3 years, for sure when I turn 60... Add to this the fact that this project was meant to be a two people project which failed to manifest in the very beginning, leaving me to run it alone. I have done many things alone in my life and have never felt scared, but by creating Mysore Berlin I had hoped to be finally able to give myself a break from always flying solo with teaching and be able to create more by a joined effort. There were more than one person who helped in the beginning who bailed out or disappeared for one reason or another. As a dear friend of mine rightly pointed out to me recently: you get to become so absorbed in yourself and what serves you with this practice that this can sometimes translate into selfishness. I hold no grudge, but I have definitely felt let down. I continued alone as things were already set in motion and used all of my remaining strength and determination to be rowing the boat alone again. Ultimately this had to come to an end. I have exhausted myself in the process, and very honestly have run out of gas. Add to this emergency family situations I had to handle in Italy in the last few months, when I became more and more aware my help and support were needed there more than what I felt were needed here.

Priorities change in life all the time. For many years I prioritised teaching and always managed to fit my single mother and family duties around it. It is for me now time to give back to whom has given me a lot. It is now time for me to be around my loved ones, and let go for a little of the hard battles. It is now time for me to let go of being strong and a trooper, as I have often been called. I feel a different kind of strength is coming to me through all this, and one that's more considerate towards myself. I will keep teaching but I will not create a Mysore shala alone anymore. A lot has also been happening in this last year in our already not always cohesive Ashtanga family, as a result of which I feel less and less willing to compromise to the current state of affairs. I know I am not alone in feeling like this. As another teacher I highly respect said on this line recently: communities of honest practitioners who keep working with integrity and keep choosing to not jump onto the market place wagon exist here and there. They don't create events to attract students, they don't offer overpriced workshops, they keep resisting the aggressive marketing tools that are offered to them. Instead, they keep choosing to keep it real and simple, a daily ground work experience where the students/teacher relationship is respected as an intimate and sacred one, and where real healing and transformation can happen.

I hope to be able to keep teaching and sharing with many of you in whatever form my teaching will now want to happen. I will for now keep a base with my beloved family in Milan, but also keep moving around wherever I am needed.

Thank you to all of you who have been part of my one year journey here in Berlin. And to the many students I met through the years in Auroville and all over the world. You have all given me an opportunity to grow and help make this world a better place. Nothing ever ends, we will all meet again...

Monica