

A Day of Saying Goodbye to Mr. Iyengar; Pune, India 2014

It is Wednesday August 20 and on arrival to the Institute for the Women's class at 9 this morning there was immediate recognition that Mr. Iyengar had died. There were pairs of shoes coupled out to the street and people gathering in the walk way to the house. The Iyengars' house is just a few strides from door to door to the Institute. On arrival August 2, I saw Mr. Iyengar sitting in the front door watching students walking up and making a right to go into the Institute. It was an opportunity to go over and bow to him in respect and gratitude. He looked frail and I heard he had not been well. I had hoped before my departure he would be back in practice and perhaps chiming in during the Women's classes. The most lovely thing happened. We were allowed to walk through the Iyengars' house and pay our respects to the Iyengar family and view Mr. Iyengar prepared for the cremation (what we would call a wake). Abijita and her husband sat on a small bench at the front door and we each greeted her with respect as we passed by to go inside. The rooms of the house are small and the line passed closely to the family almost brushing them lightly while sitting in chairs around the walls of the living room. Geeta was in the first chair, then her other sisters. Sunita, I recognized from coming to remedial classes and she used to teach occasionally for Geeta. Then the line moved us on into a small room on the side where Mr. Iyengar laid on the floor on a bamboo like mat dressed and covered with garlands of flowers and prepared for the cremation. Prashant Iyengar sat near by on the floor leaning back against the wall. It was touching to see him, a tall man sitting down like a little boy next to his father. After paying respects and the beginning of goodbyes to Mr. Iyengar, I walked out the side door to a small patio. Some people lingered to be near the house others walked on and gathered further away. There was a sign that announced the close of the Institute until Sept.2 (for the

traditional 13 day period of mourning). Another sign said we were invited to attend the cremation rites at 1:30 pm and gave the address.

Jeanne and I walked towards the street and began talking to students along the way who were beginning to gather in their groups by country—French, Israelis, English etc. all speaking about their sense of loss, the disbelief that this really had happened. Back at our apartment we regrouped and decided we needed to leave early to get a rickshaw, which could be challenging, and find the place where the cremation would take place. We did arrive early and waited and waited but I got to talk to different students who I see in classes and practices and we acknowledge each other but never really talked. So there was a milling around and talking and sharing and speaking of whether one was leaving or staying since there were no classes to take or observe. When the car arrived with Guruji, we all walked with it to the cremation site which was outdoors and down in a concrete pit. The area around the pit was surrounded by a metal pole fence, so easy to see through and keep people at a distance. We could see and feel apart of the traditional ceremony. Only men participated and were dressed in white sarong like wraps around their waist to feet. I recognized some of the men from classes or around the Institute. There was some chanting lead by a very old looking holy man. Sandalwood logs were passed around and then out to us to touch and pass on leaving the smell of sandalwood on our finger tips. Manure patties were passed around in the same manner and added to the pit. This stacking of the sandalwood and manure patties went on and then the body and then more of the sandalwood logs and patties. Ghee was poured over all of this and there was more involved but this is what I could see and some around me filled me in. The Iyengar daughters were brought closer into the circle and Prashant did a ceremonial walk around the pyre with a jug on his shoulder. There was more chanting and the fire was brought over to set fire to the pyre. More ghee was poured on

and the flames began to engulf the pyre. I took lots of pictures and felt very honored to be there.

Because the Institute is now closed there would be no goodbyes to the other students who are there with me, showing up to learn, practice and get some of the Iyengar genius for teaching yoga. It was a day of lots of goodbyes. After watching the flames for a while we headed back and decided to walk. Quite a walk but a way to process being there and what was happening. Not onto the next thing. Jeanne and I treated ourselves to a Masala Dosa and some ice cream at Vaishallis. We saw others there and nodes in recognition. Because I go in August on a every other year basis one German women came over and said she would see me in two years. That felt really nice. A friend through the years without really words shared, just the recognition of each others presence in classes and practice.

At dinner Jeanne reminded of this great quote of Mr. Iyengar's: "It is my profound hope that my end can be your beginning". I want to make that true.

Much love to you all Lou