

Testimonial

My name is Maša Blaznik, my Yoga name Mahima Devi. I started practising yoga at the Yoga in Daily Life Association (Joga v vsakdanjem življenju) in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in 1992, when I was 20 years old. In 1994 I entered the 2-year “Vedic Studies” programme held at the Jadan Ashram in India. Within the yoga community our group was known as the “Jadan students”. Back then I believed a person needs a spiritual teacher in pursuing a process of personal growth. Someone who is no longer constrained by the bonds of everyday life, a person who has achieved a higher level of consciousness and understanding and is distinguished by his/her unconditional love for all living beings. My path and my experiences there were very different from what I had imagined “spiritual development” was supposed to be.

During my stay in Jadan I myself became one of the women mentioned by the women three years ago. I had sexual intercourse with Swamiji for many years, in his rooms at the Jadan Ashram (between 1994-1996), and occasionally – again in his rooms – at the time of his seminars in Vep, in Ljubljana and in Vienna, until 2008. Sometimes the two of us were alone; other times there were many women in the room. I never spoke about this to anyone because Swamiji explicitly asked me to keep it a secret. In 1996 I was a victim of sexual assault by the Swamiji's guru Swamiji Madhavananda, but I managed to escape. I wrote Swamiji a letter telling him about this. At our next encounter he told me he would have a word with him and tell him it should never happen again. That was the last time we spoke about it. Later, the high representative of the Fellowship told me I should not communicate such things in written form.

Why did I continue with yoga for so many years afterwards, and why am I speaking out about the abuses only now? Why didn't I join the women who publicly spoke about their experience two years ago? Even though I knew they were telling the truth, I still wasn't able to speak about it because I felt too ashamed and too scared.

I had already withdrawn from the yoga community a few years before the abuses were brought to light by the women. I thought my retreat would be enough to open a new chapter in my life. During all this time I still regarded Swamiji's actions as a test of loyalty and trust in a relationship between a guru and his disciple, and I also regarded them as a way of expressing his love. The fact that I felt unpleasant and upset by his deeds, and that I did not experience them as something divine and unique, I always considered to be due to my own flaws.

However, the reactions of the yoga community members and Swamiji's own reaction to the stories revealed by the women who spoke out about the abuses were the beginning of the end for me. I knew the stories were true: deflorations, sexual games with multiple women at the same time, the story with the Guruji. Swamiji knew the women were telling the truth, and yet he called them demons in his interview, and later, after receiving advice from a PR consultant, he maintained silence on this matter. The insults and the personal discrediting of the women within the yoga community made sure that the women were labelled schizophrenic, promiscuous, and confused, as having wanted it themselves, or that he is a Tantric master, etc.

Witnessing all this, I realized the abuse we were dealing with was not just sexual abuse, but abuse that goes much deeper and is very serious. I no longer wish to be part of a community that

doesn't eat meat out of compassion for animals, but at the same time is not able to feel and show any compassion for women who disclose real abuse. By this I mean abuse by all of us – from those of us who knew they were telling the truth, to those who were not even ready to listen to them.

After having spent two decades in the yoga community, I am now aware of the dreadful impacts the experience of abuse and the secrets I still keep to myself have had on me, my life, and my relationships. All the shame I felt has kept a part of me locked away from my family, my partners, and my friends for 19 years.

My silence has served just a few people, but is harmful to so many others, including me.

Secrets make it impossible for people to have access to information that they are entitled to. Without this information, they cannot make valid decisions, and consequently fully live their lives. The lies, the keeping of secrets, and the silence maintained by Swamiji and by all those who are aware of what follows when the official part of the satsanga is finished and Swamiji retreats into his rooms, denies people the right to trust, respect, equality, and acceptance. Are these the spiritual values of the Yoga in Daily Life community?

Swamiji has abused the position of power given to him by his disciples, who see him as their spiritual teacher. He has abused the trust that allowed them to approach him, and last but not least, he has abused the sexual inviolability of the young women, even though they were of age. I find this unacceptable and consider it to be abuse in all its severity!

The abuse, however, does not end here. The organization he has built and the individuals responsible in this organization on the local/national and international levels know about Swamiji's abusive behaviour, and yet they maintain silence about it, and by maintaining silence they make it possible for the abuses to continue.

Although many people simply cannot believe that such things are happening, I would like to tell you that there is no doubt about it. It is the truth. I have no intention of trying to convince you of anything. I only wish to give you this information. What you do with it is entirely up to you.

Maša Blaznik

Ljubljana/Slovenia, March 27, 2014