

# An Interview with Shawn Parell

## Prana Flow Teacher and Yoga Activist

by Erin Floresca

Shawn Parell teaches Prana Flow at BODY in Santa Fe and serves as Director of Anahata International, a nonprofit bringing yoga to vulnerable communities around the world.

### You started practicing yoga at a young age. What drew you to it? When did you know you wanted to teach others?

I came to yoga through suffering, as many practitioners do. At twelve years old, I was careening towards adolescence haunted by unprocessed childhood trauma and doubts about my own worth. I was lost, and sought false refuge in smoking, drinking, and all manner of self-destruction.

My stepmother took me to my first yoga class. For sixty minutes, the instructions were simple: listen, breath, move, and repeat. And something happened. By *savasana*, I felt more tender-hearted than I could remember. I felt like the child I was.

Yoga soon became a daily practice and, over the years, the guiding force of my life. Teaching came later, through a similarly gradual integration process. I see teaching as a natural pulsation from the heart of my practice: it's an affirmation of sharing and receiving.

### How does your work in activism relate to yoga?

*Seva*, or selfless service, is an integral part of any holistic yoga practice. For me, *seva* has taken the form of build-



ing sustainable yoga communities in conflict-affected places around the world, most recently in the West Bank. The more we open our hearts in service to others, the more we can sense ourselves in every other sentient being. It's a yoga thing, but really it's a human thing.

### What does "flow" mean in the context of yoga?

Flow is the state of unified consciousness, wherein all component parts absorb into wholeness. The natural world is governed by flow – it's something we can all relate to before we get to our first yoga class. In practice, flow is an organic entrainment of movement, breathe, intention, and awareness. It's experiencing ourselves as not just what we think or what happens to us, but as an evolutionary process. The great invitation of yoga is to awaken to that process.

### We hear the term "vinyasa" a lot. How can it apply on or off the mat?

*Vinyasa* comes from two Sanskrit roots: *nyasa*, "to place," and *vi*, "in a special way." Functionally, vinyasa yoga is

breath-initiated movement designed to reflect and syncopate us with our natural rhythms. We can use the term to refer to any vital experience with a beginning, middle, and end, though – so, the course of a season, the arch of a life, or even the unfolding of one day are all vinyasas.

In yoga philosophy, the term *parinamavada* acknowledges that change is inherent to life and any effect is the *parinama* (or transformation) of its cause. It's like the old adage says, "you can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf." Vinyasa is about learning to surf. If we can attune to our breath-wave and the sensational flow of our aliveness, then we can cultivate



awareness in navigating the innumerable, inevitable, and unpredictable changes that are integral to life – and ultimately serve our conscious evolution.

**So vinyasa is about learning to go with the flow. I like that. What is Prana Flow?**

Yes, but it's not about passivity. Ultimately, we're learning how to show up for life in a more skillful, receptive way – and that takes courage.

Prana Flow is a synthesis-oriented form of vinyasa created by my root teacher, Shiva Rea. The style recognizes *prana* as the universal source of breath, life-energy, and conscious intelligence, and offers a dynamic, full spectrum approach to living yoga through the teachings of ayurveda, bhakti, tantra, and classical yoga philosophy.

**Sounds great. What's a class like?**

A Prana Flow class is a form of ritual *sadhana* – a groove unto oneself. It's like a collective dunk in the primordial stew of our heart-body-mind; we surrender our anxieties about getting somewhere or doing something, and instead awaken to our dynamic experience just as it is. My teacher likens Prana Flow to jazz – there's an intelligent base of technique whereupon improvisation can express by invoking the creativity we are. In my own experience, the technique has come through many years of disciplined study, and the creativity arises from listening inwardly in any moment. It's a deep and joyful practice.

**Any advice for someone just beginning a yoga practice?**

Come as you are and come often. Listen, breathe, move, and repeat! 🌸

*Shawn Parell is an international yoga teacher, 500 E-RYT teacher and activist. Shawn lives with her husband in Santa Fe and studies Eastern Classics at St. John's College.*

# ecotip

## Green Christmas

### Holiday Planet Savers

Here are some fresh ways to tweak family traditions for a greener holiday this and every year.

**Incorporate local, sustainable cuisine into the family feast.** Ingredients for a traditional holiday dinner can travel up to 30,000 miles. Instead, show support for local community farmers and reduce food transportation miles by choosing a heritage turkey or meatless entrée. Stellar complements may include organic cranberry jelly, mulled apple cider or wine from an area farm, orchard or vineyard.

**Adopt or recycle the Christmas tree.** According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, as many as 33 million live-cut Christmas trees are purchased each year in North America, and most end up in landfills. Fortunately, Christmas tree adoption services like Central California's Rent a Living Christmas Tree are popping up across the country, allowing them to go on living. The potted trees can be rented and delivered.

If tree adoption services are not yet available locally, make sure to recycle a live holiday tree so it's turned into landscape mulch for reuse as ground cover to hinder weeds and nourish plantings.



**Reduce energy costs through efficient cooking.**

Wait to fire up the oven until the heritage turkey or organic ham is ready to go in; preheating is unnecessary for these slow-roasting items. For baked goods, opt for glass or ceramic pans, which allow cooking time to remain the same while lowering the heat by about 25 degrees. Another energy-saving trick is to place stovetop cookware on the smallest burner possible; more heat will embrace the pan, while less is lost to the surrounding air. A six-inch pan on an eight-inch burner typically wastes more than 40 percent of the energy generated. Crockpots work well for serving other small family dinners during the busy holiday season or anytime; an entire meal requires about 17 cents worth of electricity.

At cleanup time, load up the dishwasher fully. One load of dishes scrubbed in a dishwashing machine uses 37 percent less water than washing the same dishes by hand.

**Send plant-able holiday cards.** According to CalRecycle, an estimated 2.6 billion holiday cards are sold each year in the United States, enough to fill a football field 10 stories high. This year, instead of the usual snail mail, send a bouquet of flowers for the price of a stamp. Recipients can plant a *GreenFieldPaper.com* grow-a-note holiday card in the ground and see wildflowers bloom. For plant-able holiday cards that can be personalized with a corporate logo, *BotanicalPaperworks.com* offers card sets and party favors.