Embodying the Flow :
Teaching Vinyasa Flow Yoga

An Interview with Shiva Rea

with Sea R. Glassman, Interviewer

Sea R. Glassman, filmmaker, writer, poet , artist and yogini, has been a friend and student of Shiva's for over twelve years. She is a Yoga teacher and Healing Energy worker who shares Shiva's passion to live and study the Flow in all aspects of life. This dialogue transpired over the course of a few days with the intention to shed light on both the details of teaching Vinyasa Flow Yoga , and the desire to reveal the greater metaphors about living a vital and courageous life inherent to the practice of Vinyasa Flow Yoga. Sea's questions and comments are in italics, while Shiva's are in plain text. Some Sanskrit words are also italicized.

What do you think is the ultimate job of the Teacher?

Well the root meaning of " *guru* , " which is teacher, is " the one who removes ' *Viddahiya* ' or ignorance, - the darkness. The one who brings light, - you could see it in the positive if you want , as the one who brings light or the one who dispels darkness . And it doesn't mean to create a polarity but it means the one who removes obstacles, the one who brings insight.

For me , in terms of Americans becoming teachers on the path of yoga, it's important to know that there are different kinds of teachers and I think some of the challenges that American teachers face is that we're teaching much younger than anyone would be charged or supported or given a transmission to teach in India. There's a much longer period of apprenticing under **your** teacher, who is usually fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty, ninety years old. I don't think though , that this is something that we need to then throw in the towel and say "Oh well! How can I become a teacher? I'm young. I've only been doing yoga for one year, five years, ten years, twenty years ..." I think there are different kinds of teachers, and different stages of becoming a teacher and even as I look at all the different teachers I've had , I can see there are different -I don't want to call them categories , but different functions of the teachers, some of which we can assume quite early on.

Obviously one function is that we are transmitting the technique of yoga ,

which is like a raft, a vehicle for transformation, and the most important thing for every teacher is to assume the role of the teacher as a kind of " *mitra* " or as a friend.

A mitra ?

It means a spiritual friend. I mean all the good qualities of a friend ; that you support someone, that you have a sense of benevolence towards them, a sense of unconditional love and support, which, to me you can extend to even someone that you are meeting for the first time, because in the path of *Bhakti Yoga* , devotional yoga, you are always Honoring the One. So there's the *mitra* , which is a friend, and think of how we turn to our friends in our lives- they're the ones who simply tell us the truth, but perhaps gently ... do you know what I mean? Gently.

If you've chosen your friends and teachers wisely, then you can expect truthful, benevolent feedback. But constructive.

Yes. Yes, but it holds the truth. I think of my best friends as the ones who are not afraid, who have been given my permission to hold that truth . How do we hold that truth as teachers? It means we're giving honest feedback on the bodily level, on the energetic level, either through your touch or through your words, about where they need to be supported ...

Another role of the teacher is as a guide or usher on the yogic journey. When I say Usher, I use it as a metaphor because the role of the teacher is to help the student find that seat by themselves where they come in contact with the Great Guru, with the capitol G, the One Teacher that Patanjali refers to...

The Teacher Within.

Yes, the first and foremost teacher is God within the Self.

You mentioned the techniques of Yoga as a raft ... what would be the river?

The river is life, but the techniques of Yoga are that which will help you navigate through the rough spots of the river.

And perhaps transformation occurs on the sail, on the trip...

Absolutely. Yes, we could flesh out that metaphor more but I also think there's the role of the teacher as a midwife. We all come in to the world with certain constitutions, and those constitutional orientations, within Ayerveda are called *doshas* - your *prakriti*, your genetic nature, and your personality traits. All of these become -later in life, your body mind patterns , and it develops into your orientation even towards yoga . Maybe you're more of a bhakti yogan- more devotionally oriented, or if you're more Hatha yoga oriented - you understand Yoga more through the vehicle of bodily transformation , which includes everything but you're more kinesthetically oriented .

Define Kinesthetic.

Kinesthetic is bodily intelligence.

An awareness of the Self through the body.

Yes. Through the body. It's an actual form of intelligence. Think of it as when we were first born. It's primarily our kinesthetic intelligence that actually stimulates our verbal and cognitive skills that develop through touch. Through the body is how we develop our sensory motor pathways of how we come to know the world.

Right. The body as a receptor of information.

Yes. And some people are more intellectually oriented,- the path of *Jnana Yoga.* It refers to the Yoga of Self Knowledge. It usually refers to someone who studies ancient or sacred texts in any tradition.

They have a more intellectual approach to understanding the world...

An intellectual approach to Self Knowledge, Self Realization.

And the Self as World.

Anyhow, the teacher as midwife is the one who helps you birth , in a way, aspects of yourself that perhaps have been either limited by your constitution , by your body mind patternings. In the yoga asanas, the teacher as midwife is the one who really helps you go through all of the strength and weakness imbalances in your body which are never just on a physical level. So , as we're opening our hips in Baddha Konasana there may be a physical shift, but there

are other corresponding kinds of emotional and internal shifts that are occurring.

For instance, what is it to “ learn to surrender? ” Is it a physical state? An emotional state? A spiritual state? Internal shifts integrate the different dimensions of our Self.

A physical shift can trigger an emotional shift. Shifts will probably occur on all levels sometimes.

Exactly.

But maybe you use the fabric of the body to get in.

Exactly.

Or perhaps with some people, you’d have to approach them in a more intellectual way and give them verbal information.

Exactly.

In other words, you’d say that one of the jobs of the teacher is to be able to be aware of the constitutions of those who are in front of them.

Yes and to understand which approach would best benefit the student, the more practical karma yoga, the kinesthetic hatha yoga, the heart oriented bhakti yoga or the intellectual approach of jnana yoga.

Let’s talk about Flow.

O.K. How is Vinyasa Flow Yoga related to the larger path of Yoga, the larger stream of Yoga?

First we’ll say that there’s a universal understanding of Yoga as any path of Unification , and in that way, Yoga is both a verb , and a state of being. Meaning any activity, any path that unifies. Unifies what? Unifies all of the dimensions of our being that sometimes feel separate. Our sense of our physical body being separate from our mental body, our mental body being separate from our emotional body. All of these dimensions being separate from our energy body , our soul, the *Atman*.

So, Yoga on a universal level is any activity , any path that leads towards integration or wholeness of the human being. You can also see it on all the other different levels: between human beings, within the community , and globally. It's also a state of being unified. So it's both a verb and a state of consciousness, a state of unified consciousness. This is why I feel that Yoga is now a global practice . It isn't being limited by people's religious or spiritual orientations.

Also, in a more specific definition, Yoga refers to the philosophy and techniques of the practice that create this unified state of being or that serve to unify the human being . These techniques originate within India, and within a context of Hinduism, which is again a very general term that is not used by Indians themselves. It was a term coined by the Greeks meaning basically the people who live in the Indus valley. Hinduism itself is very rich and is usually called *Santana Dharma* - the Eternal Dharma , the Eternal Path of Truth.

Hinduism itself is like a huge complex of different relationships to the one All-Pervading-Energy-of-the-Divine , towards which people from different families, different villages, different states in India , have more specific orientations. So you'll find the three main streams of Hinduism are *Vaishnavism Shavism and Shakti-ism,* if you want to put the isms on the end, but it's a stream of all the different incarnations of *Vishnu,* which includes *Krishna and Rama ,* and their consorts *Krishna Rada and Sita Rama.* Shavism is basically connected to Shiva and Shaktiism is the connection to the Divine Mother . Those are the three main spiritual rivers, but there are thousands and thousands of tributaries.

So Yoga exists also within the context of Hinduism. It shares chants and techniques that are born out of the more than five thousands years of its existence.

Hatha Yoga here in the United States means the path of Yoga that uses *Asana* as the primary vehicle of transformation. Vinyasa Flow is a branch of the tree of Hatha Yoga, and within that tree of Hatha Yoga , you find the lineage of Krishnamarcharya, the lineage of Sivananda, and the lineage of Kripaluananda - various teachers who then work with the techniques of Hatha Yoga, which are Asana, Pranayama, Bandha, and Meditation, and Kriyas (cleansing practices).

Vinyasa Flow in the tree of Hatha Yoga comes out of the lineage of Sri T.V. Krishnamarcharya as teacher. And there are three main teachers that came

out of these teachings; Sri Patabhi Jois with Ashtanga , and then Vinyasa Yoga, TKS Iyengar with Iyengar Yoga , and TKV Desikachar with Vini Yoga. Vinyasa Flow was born in American soil , even though it is in relationship to this larger context of Hatha Yoga and Yoga as path of Unification , - as the huge incredible stream of Yoga , it was really born over the last three decades, 70's, 80's, 90's, and now into the 21st century of Western Yoga teachers beginning to study with these different streams, Asthanga , Iyengar, Vini yoga as well as other streams, including teachers of Tantra and Kundalini Yoga. It all comes from the quintessential Western experience, particularly the American experience of being exposed to diversity and then creating a means by which to integrate, synthesize and express the diversity.

In other words, there are people who started studying with Iyengar, people who started studying Ashtanga, Vinyasa, and people who started studying with Desikachar, Viniyoga , and stayed true to just those different systems, because those three are systems within themselves.

Like a religion?

It's not a religion, it's just a system. It wants to be a system that is not diluted. Shri Patabhi Jois doesn't want the Ashtanga series to break down and become different things. He wants it to stay that way. But then you have Iyengar which is going so deeply into alignment and yoga therapy , and the use of props. Then you find in Viniyoga this whole attention to use of Vinyasa in terms of adapting to individual needs.

So you find in Vinyasa Flow Yoga, which is born more out of Ashtanga because of the integration of the very, very heart of Vinyasa as chattarunga, upward dog , and downward dog, the series of poses that link the Ashtanga series. On a movement level, that's the heart of the Vinyasa, which is complete in itself - it illustrates the principle of Vinyasa, of linking movement and breath, and of using counter poses.

... (downward dog) which is a counterpose ...

A counterpose for back bend. So this is a reflection of the heart of Vinyasa, which is preparation. So you heat the body first. Then you prepare to move towards a greater culmination and then from that culmination you come down from the mountain and you do the counterpose in response .

It's like story structure!

Exactly. So Vinyasa Flow tends to look more like Ashtanga then the other systems, but the main difference is that it is not a set sequence. It incorporates more of Viniyoga in that there is a sense of using smaller sequences towards a specific aim , and that aim can change.

Vinyasa Flow mostly originates from Shri Patabhi Jois' teaching of Ashtanga.

Yes, but he's not saying " Oh ! Go teach Vinyasa Flow ! ". It just happened. It just happened that people found they might be getting too injured in Ashtanga , or they were wanting to teach to different populations that weren't strong enough to do Ashtanga . Or they found , like what happened to me after doing Ashtanga for ten years and going very very slowly all the way through the third series, that after I gave birth to my son and then went back to that system , there was a huge organic shift that permeated all the dimensions of my being. I had been totally initiated into a different rhythm , a different consciousness. I needed to be able to fully explore the possibilities, which is something you might find more in an Iyengar practice. So I began to integrate the option of taking longer holds in poses , going deeper in hip openers, or investigating variations in back bends...

Instead of an eight breath hold...

Instead of only five or eight breaths. Exactly. Sometimes wanting to address certain - I call them " leaks in the boat, " whether it's a weakness in the body or a tightness in the body. Out of love, wanting to spend more time on really opening my psoas and quadriceps. When I say things on a muscular level, it's really the first doorway to everything else, it's never just the physical. Plus I think giving birth was a deep initiation into the intuitive mystery of being alive. There's so little that you can control when you're giving birth, not that you would want to control it but more like the incredible satisfaction of following energy as it's unfolding in the form of having life grow inside you...

... Which, although there's a certain time line, it is new to the mother, and is not necessarily going to absolutely unfold in this certain sequence, in this certain way, in this exact amount of time, so you're organically drawn to a new way of participating in the unfolding.

Yes , and also giving birth is the quintessential creative act. One of my teachers, Shandor Remete, said this to me when I was pregnant , “You will really come to know your life force when you’re pregnant.” And so what I found when I emerged from this initiation of giving birth and also breast feeding, was that I was being initiated into the deep creative potential of life. All the cycles. You have to die many times when you ’re becoming a mother. Die to your old body. Die to the old rhythms of your life.

And you have to honor each passage. You have to be completely present in each cycle.

Absolutely.

I can see where that would lead you out of a certain way of being. Now that you’re in this new place with your practice, do you think in ten or twenty years you’ll be in a whole other place that you can’t even foresee?

Oh totally, totally, that’s always my prayer. A prayer within yoga . Which is why I feel so excited about Vinyasa. It’s an evolutionary path. It puts you in touch with the creative unfolding of life as it is happening inside you , and then to express that fully through your practice ... do you know what I’m saying ?

Yeah!

And that’s my prayer. That we all continue to evolve.

It’s almost as if you’re part of a new generation of Yoga teachers who are integrating everything that has come to pass in Yoga thus far.

Yes, and I think the people who are drawn into Vinyasa flow - and this gets into the question of being a Vinyasa Flow teacher in the United States- are people who are not necessarily bucking the system, but just weren’t drawn to an orthodox path or , as we started to follow an orthodox path , there was an intrinsic sense of loss. It wasn’t about “ my independence, ” “ my ego,” or “ I’m not gonna follow that! ” As a child, even though you experience growing up in your parent’s household in a certain way and you don’t know the specifics of other approaches, you may still have an intrinsic sense that there are other parts of yourself that are wanting to be born ...

... like a city kid wanting to go into the forest and run ...

Yes , or someone who's an artist who grows up in a scientific household or a scientist who grows up in an artistic household . We're nourished to an extent, but you feel that you have to continue the exploration...

It's almost as if there's a knock at the door of the heart saying " let me out!"

Yes ! I have deep deep *pranams* - whole body prostration respect -for the lineage of Yoga, the passing of the flame. I feel blessed to have received transmissions from many different teachers. However, no matter what form you look at- if you look in the arts, if you look in the realm of science, or at spiritual traditions in India, there is always evidence of those who do further exploration, and take their art or science or technique beyond the known. These are the Isadora Duncans who have studied ballet, but then decide they need to branch off, or the person who studies with Martha Graham , and learns the technique, but knows that something else has to be born from it, like Jose Limon . In Vinyasa Flow yoga , what has come before is absolutely the fertile ground of evolution.

Siddhartha Gautama had to leave the palace because though he had everything, he had an intrinsic feeling that for his evolution as a soul, he needed to leave, it wasn't enough. Then he went and he found all different yogis, he did all different kinds of tapas and ascetic practices and still there was the evolutionary call . You have to move on from there too, and he did. He sat under the Boddhi tree and found his home.

Vinyasa is grounded in the philosophy and techniques of Yoga , but it gives you fertile ground to find your expression in a way that's very authentic and fresh and alive. I draw a lot of inspiration from Jazz. In Patanjali 's concept of shtira and sukha- you need the steadiness of technique, but the sukha is the improvisation , the creative energy, like what you hear in a jazz rift . We say this in class, the beginning of Surya Namaskara is like learning to play the scales. It doesn't matter how long you've been playing. It's good to come back and hit the different notes. Technique means a refinement of the relationship to life energy. We could all take a horn and play anything but that doesn't sound very refined . We have limitations. We play one note and it goes whooop! but if we just start with the scales , later we can refine our energetic expression through that instrument. The teachers who are drawn to VF Yoga in the United States are people who are becoming yoga teachers in their twenties, thirties , and forties, and they are bringing whole selves to this practice . They bring their lives and

backgrounds to the teaching.

We are working with the techniques of Yoga. We are experimenting , expressing within the rhythm and requirements of the class. If you come from a very athletic background and you know the ritual of starting from somewhere and finishing , then you know the empowerment and transformation that comes from that 'Stay with it' process. You know the process of biking from the bottom to the top of a mountain and you can apply that to your class. You may have a lot of rich life experience that is already telling you about the unified state of consciousness that comes from that kind of dynamic empowerment, and you may be drawn to teaching in more athletic environments , or students may be drawn to you. Your pacing of the flow may be more dynamic or relate more to your life as an athlete , or surfer or rock climber , and those metaphors are within you.

In this teacher's training, I want to help empower people sooner rather than later to connect with their own core energy in relationship to Yoga, because that's when the teacher starts to become really inspired. The class has sparks, and it's juicy because they're speaking from their own experience. Rather than what I see happens to a lot of young teachers , who feel like they have to list all of this alignment, or they're worried about where they have to place the body, whether they're doing everything right , or if they sound like a teacher . It's hard to build a class because you're not out there connecting to your own creative energy. So what we want to empower people to do is to have a good sense of alignment, a sense of which structures to begin to play with , but then how to work with rhythm , how to work with voice, how to assess the energy that you see in a student in a class, so that finding the flow is a very organic , evolutionary, living process and not some cookie cutter repetition.

I feel like there are some very specific needs that Vinyasa Flow is addressing in the Western Yoga world. One is that most of our lifestyles are monotone on the movement level, and I speak even for myself. In other words, if you really kept a log through the day of how many different movements you did : sitting , standing - and there'd be a few shifts of the hips, walking ...

...driving...

All on the frontal plane.

It's pretty bleak.

Yes . And the range of motion, the diversity of movement experience is very limited, even if you're a Yoga teacher. Any style of Hatha Yoga is reawakening your range of diversity.

Our modern lives don't require much diversity of movement.

Right. We need stimulation on all levels. But I don't agree with the view that Americans are obsessed with Hatha Yoga because we're so "identified " with our bodies, and not spiritually oriented. I think that the spiritual crisis in America is not that we're so much into our bodies, it's that we're into our heads and we're *trying* to get 'in' to our bodies.

We're out of our bodies.

We know on an intrinsic level that something is wrong. We know this. Not just this decade but its been going on for this whole past century. Do you know what I mean?

Well, since we've stopped having to survive by using our bodies -

Yes, or riding horses or - a lot of different rhythms going on. And we know in our nervous systems that we are ...

...on overload.

Overloaded.

This is a huge thing- it also relates to the philosophy of Trance Dance. We find ourselves in this strange situation where mentally we are scattered. Mentally we are overloaded and we have to tend to the ten thousand things rising and falling. And yet on a bodily level we are more stagnant and limited. Vinyasa Flow actually reverses that, and the mind becomes one pointed. Its only focus is Now. In the body. Your mind rests on your breath and lets the breath drive. And your nervous system is adjusted.

And we'll get to talking about the flow of the class here because sometimes, particularly in urban settings, if you start the class just with meditation, most people are going to be sitting and fidgeting and just trying to download from their day. So actually using complexity of movement and reintegrating the body first is often a path that leads them to sitting in meditation

at the end.

Let's get back to what I was saying about reshifting the focus from being mentally scattered, nervous system overloaded, body stagnant, to mind calm and focused, nervous system becoming more empty and the body becoming more alive and diverse through the asanas. In Vinyasa the focus is the whole mandala of the body. You also find there's an emphasis on the freshness of each class, by having a wide palette of different sequences and different rhythmic orientations so that its possible that no class ever looks the same. This is something that on a soul level is a way for me to say " yes! " to life. It's like a mini activism.

It's like saying no to the practice of genetically modified food ... - like in the organic farming movement or in the ecological movement of preserving the diversity of different eco -systems, mono crops of genetic seeding- where the seeds are all genetically uniform and are not being naturally diversified through the natural wild crafting of seeds , in which people are planting seeds that are already genetically modified and every seed is the same...

Eek.

... Is not sustainable. The crops don't have the same resilience. Like when we clear cut an entire forest, we cannot replant that diversity.

No.

Aligning with diversity , which does not mean exclusion of simplicity or a "let's just keep creating new new new things" kind of mentality. It's not an impatience with deepening into a process. It's like keeping a certain steadiness and depth in your practice but letting that be rejuvenated through spontaneity, diversity, creativity and absolute reverence and attention on who you are in that moment.

If you go out on a river , or you go out to sea, and you have your compass - I love the arrow of the compass- you know how it goes back and forth ? And it's so beautiful when it fits, it centers. Flow is like that. What's more satisfying when you're on a road trip, putting your car on cruise control or driving yourself? On some level it's satisfying 'cause you can just lay back and talk but , come on , it just gets you somewhere fast. But let's talk on a soul level. You can take your frozen dinner and pop your box into the microwave , press a

button and there you have it, but does that taste as good as when you cook it yourself and bring out all the different spices...

And you get it from your garden.

Yeah and you're pinching stuff and tasting it. Of course, sometimes we do something and it's the straight path and that's where we're headed. The art of flow is always that we observe nature and that we observe our participation in nature.

It's about a process.

It's process oriented and it includes the excitement of having to make a decision in this moment, the excitement of not knowing.

Let me reiterate something that keeps coming up. With great respect to the transmission that has come before, it seems that your desire is to take this transmission to the next level, and it's almost like a personal and global call to human evolution through Yoga. That's what I get from what you're saying.

Yes, I guess on some level I do feel altruistic about it because all of us care about what's happening on the environmental, social and political levels . We want to know how our lives are relating to that. The next phase in our evolution is to synthesize. In the West , the different aspects of yog are coming together. So working with Jai Uttal and integrating *kirtan*, integrating Bhakti Yoga and Hatha Yoga, and bringing the traditional mantras of Surya Namaskara into the Sun Salutations, which are very devotional towards Life Force, is very important.

Kirtan is chanting?

Chanting, yes. The mantras of the Sun Salutations , such as " Om Mitraya Namah " which is " Salutations to the Friend of All ," is about the sun having this unconditional radiance. So I think Vinyasa Flow is also open to cross fertilization or the integration of other aspects of Yoga. It also lends itself to meditation practice because of the polarity of moving into stillness . Sometimes the dynamic movement is a really incredible pathway for creating the right conditions for meditations. The body is open and the breath is already ripe . So you can see how Hatha Yoga , with all the asanas as " seats ", actually prepares

you to sit inside yourself.

As a teacher, you're very optimistic about those who come, almost as if, yes, as soon as we begin the practice, we are entering the flow. Yet my observation as a teacher is that there's sometimes a bit of a struggle or path of resistance that has to be traveled before they come awake within the flow. Maybe at some point you can address that.

We can go into some of the challenges to teaching Vinyasa Flow.

I don't want to be negative.

No. No.

But as a teacher when you look around, you can almost see the thoughts springing out of people's heads !

And you see the sweet faces.

And you're thinking " How can I help them settle? "

Right, right.

I also want to ask about preparation and flying by the seat of the pants, speaking of seats.

OK ! Challenges in an urban setting we've already spoken about, and the nature of the urban nervous system. Challenge, from a yoga perspective , is always fodder for the practice. And so the *vrittis*, the fluctuations of the mind, are really a source of energy . They are energy that has gotten diffused or bound.

So the point is this energy needs to be channeled.

Exactly. The challenges of an urban setting, particularly teaching in LA are : you come into the class, there's a quick change of the class , there's not time to settle in, everyone is trying to find their place, people find their place, people are driving , hurrying , parking. Some people arrive early and are in meditation. The biggest challenge in teaching Flow is that from where you start there are going to be some people who are not in their own flow, in fact, not only

are they not in their own flow, they are coming from a disharmonious flow, whether from the stress of driving or the rhythm of their day not yet being integrated with their life energy...

Are you scanning the class immediately?

Absolutely, but it becomes less and less the more you work with a similar group of people. We'll get to that in a moment. So, some people are arriving in the flow, some are disconnected to the flow, some coming in with a funky flow. And that's cool.

Yeah , they've just flipped off a fellow driver!

No judgment, no judgment ! It's just been a funky flow day! Some people are coming in an harmonious and spacious state. So this all sums up to people coming in with different states of being that you could actually describe rhythmically. So the challenge is finding...

Physical states that can be translated rhythmically ?

Yes, yes. Like slow and steady, neurotic and everywhere, nervous...

Like Gabrielle Roth's way of describing rhythms?

Yes, you could see it as some people being in chaos, stillness, etc...

You're doing a general scan of the energy in the room in terms of rhythm.

Also on a rhythmic level, we are all collectively faced with being influenced by a larger rhythm of the seasons , of the moon , and whatever collective things are happening, whether tensions <u>or</u> celebrations.

Right.

The challenge in creating Flow, if you want to do this in a way that we were talking about earlier, in not just a cookie cutter manner but really living and responding to the moment , is that you need to find the raft that's going to be spacious enough for everyone to find their way down the river in that class.

Luckily, if you're teaching in a mixed level class, it means people already

have some orientation to the experience of a Unified Flow Consciousness , within stillness and movement. They will know what a really beautiful , deep Savasana feels like. They' ll know what it feels like to be passing through a link in the standing poses and feel their breath sustaining itself.

To feel that kind of flow when you're in a dynamic rhythm in class feels similar to experiences of dance, or when you're entering ' The Zone ' - surfing , kayaking, running, - when there's the entrainment of all the dimensions of your being, so that your life energy feels like it's carrying you, that it's doing the activity. All of a sudden , you're being run , you're being danced, you've entered into the **Flow.**

It's almost a trance state. You're engaged in a deeper groove...

Yes. You're engaged, and some people describe that as movement meditation . The fact that everyone has started from different states becomes fodder for your creativity, as does the fact that some people already know what Flow is from their Yoga practice , and have an orientation in their nervous system towards Flow.

One of the things that you're transmitting to those on a beginning level is "what does the Flow of Yoga feel like?" The benefit there is that people are kind of open. They don't have preconceived ideas or notions that they're beginning to be attached to on a rhythmic level. Both sets have their own challenges. Each thing has its own hindrance. Beginners are more open , but they have less inner and outer experience from which you can draw to create the Flow. You're really setting up the Experience of Flow. Whereas in a mixed level class they have an experience of flow but that too can be a hindrance because they attach to certain things that they like about a flow and certain things that they dislike about a flow.

Experience creates likes and dislikes, so keeping it new becomes the challenge.

These are all factors in getting the group energy of the class to begin to syncopate and align and ultimately entrain. These are important words.

Define entrain.

Entrainment. To entrain. It's a verb, but the state of being entrained is entrainment. Entrainment is how all of the planets are moving around the sun. They're in an entrained rhythm. Like when you go to a concert and everyone starts clapping , and at first they're clapping in different rhythms and then they all start clapping together- that's entrainment. I don't know if it's a Law of Physics but it's a phenomenon recognized within physics that when different bodies begin to sync up on a rhythmic level...

When disparate energies, different elements come into sync...

... that's what syncopation is, what alignment is...

We're looking for that experience.

Yes . Exactly.

And all of us are. Even when we come into the class, on some level, we're looking to come out of that frenetic state and to join up with something greater ...

Yes. We're coming with our individual needs, and one unconscious need for Westerners is the experience of Group Mind. The experience of the Tribe. Just think of how powerful the experience is when the teacher leading the yoga class is actually getting the ten , twenty , thirty or in a conference, three hundred, to be breathing together! All inhaling, taking our arms up, exhaling , taking our arms down- that is extremely powerful. We don't even have that experience with people we love. How many times do we just go home and sit with our husband , our mother and father or our son and daughter and say "let's just sit together and breathe . Let's inhale together , let's exhale together. " It's extremely powerful.

It's very powerful. What you're saying is this is not a concept that we're actually familiar with. We're not even knowing that that's a possibility. A group experience of Unity.

We don't even know that we need it.

We desperately need it.

One of the things that has formed my experience of Vinyasa Flow is a

principle from my dance background , which is about the entrainment of the *community.* I encourage *everybody* who gets inspired by this system to awaken this concept within themselves.

This was my experience in Africa when I lived there for two and a half years studying African Dance. It's all about entrainment of the individual with the community on such a powerful, powerful level.

Absolutely.

Often our experience in Yoga is very individually oriented, but when you're in India, you see both the individual pilgrim, and you see bus loads and car loads of pilgrims chanting together " Jai, jai ram "- bus loads chanting together, or you find the temple is playing a chant early in the morning and people have their own relationship to mantra that's already alive and they're already beginning to attune to that.

And we don't have that in our landscape. We used to, and people who go to church certainly have that experience. Because they go and they're singing together , which is also like doing pranayama together, because when you are singing you can only exhale. So when you are singing together , you are breathing together. I mean you may take your own individual breath here and there but in general you are doing pranayama together.

The unifying life of the Church is really being disintegrated in America and that is probably because there are elements of that life that are not satisfying. We probably shouldn't go into this, but I go to my father's church, a primarily black church for gay and lesbians and my father is white and heterosexual. You walk in there and there is entrainment. There is Flow. Everybody is singing from the depths of their being. Do you know what I mean? And I remember going with my Grandmother to an Episcopal church, and I didn't feel like the space was being filled. The separation of flesh and spirit that has been a conflict for several thousand years in Western culture was present - St. Augustine, in 3oo A.D., declared that the body was the source of all sin and our job is to transcend this hellish body...

I mean, Eek.

Yes, well , you can sense that separation when you go to some churches. And so I think people who are drawn to Yoga are having fulfilling experiences

in whatever spiritual tradition and accentuating that through Yoga- they have a church that they're deeply involved with , or a Buddhist practice that's very fulfilling, or they go to their synogage and do Sabbath at home and it's deeply moving for them. And Yoga is echoing and supporting that. Or they're people who just don't resonate with any of the spiritual traditions that they grew up with. They felt the emptiness and separation of that, and are looking for experiences where they can have that unification as an individual. And we don't talk about it much in the Yoga community but it is this group entrainment on a spiritual level that draws them , - and when I say spiritual, I'm meaning at the heart of being alive, which is breathing. Because Vinyasa Flow is oriented around breath, it is absolutely a spiritual practice that is not in conflict with any spiritual tradition, unless that tradition feels that somehow being alive is something that you just have to endure until the next life. Because Vinyasa Flow is all about being liberated now- Jivamukti.

The Liberation of the Soul. Now.

Jiva as in soul. *Mukti* as in liberation. Liberated. In <u>this moment</u>.

As an artist, it's something that I think about a lot. That we don't know we're starved for that group experience. And along with the church, the closest thing that our modern life offers us in which to have this participatory experience is to attend a movie where we' re all at least experiencing triggers of emotion at the same time, but even that has begun to be taken away from us by the technological advances that bring DVDs, Tivo and advanced entertainment centers into the home, so we're more and more being taken away from possibilities for entrainment. In light of the events in our lives right now , there seems to be a global call to move towards entrainment.

But you can't take it away because people will seek it like they seek water.

Right . They don't know that they need it, though, at this point, but it's coming.

We are not articulate about needing it ; so we'll go to clubs, to sporting events , we'll go to the theater, to concerts...

It's a kind of hidden desire. Like you're lost. You're a mole under ground , looking to come to the surface. Every time I go to the Hollywood Bowl, I'm awe-

struck by how many people are experiencing the same musical event. I feel entrainment very powerfully there.

You can be explicit about it, like in the very beginning of class, when we do the Sea of Oms, I say " we're not going to say when this Om is going to end," because we are entering into Group Mind. You don't want to trip anyone up, because some people, as they are entering into yoga , are fiercely holding on to their independent thinking and all of that, which is great! But you don't want to trip them out on what they feel they need to hold on to, like their own discriminative powers. So, good! Stay attuned to your powers!

This comes up immediately, this stuff!

Yeah. No one is saying " by entering into Group Mind you're ..."

Giving yourself up!

Yeah! Signing up...

But it feels like that to some because that's how the Ego operates.

Sure. So they may not be ready for a flow class. They may need something that's strictly kind of technical.

Because I'm interested in the phenomenon of resistance, I was following the process around the group doing the Sea of Oms. When we first started , there was some stumbling and hesitation, but now it feels like a whole different thing. We are entering into it now. After a certain amount of time and familiarity, there was the Let Go, and then we could enter. Which seems to me the process of everything. There's resistance, there's the letting down of resistance which is surrender, and then you find your way in to having this big experience. I see that happening with the Sea of Oms. But first it's like " What? Why am I being asked to do this? Do I wait for someone else to start? Should I start if there's a pause? How will I distinguish myself? Do I blend in? Help!"

Right. Right. So when you're creating a flow class , you have to be aware of whatever challenges are up at that moment. And this is not every class that you are aware of this. You can go for whole periods where things seem quite steady, and then you start to notice that you walk in and something's up. If you're a female teacher, you're having your menstrual cycle, which changes

your psychological state. Life is change.

Sure. Or there's a death in the family or a fight with your boyfriend...

Sure , and that is a challenge for the teacher of flow. In order to be open and listen to what's needed in the moment, you have to be able to both draw on your experience, but **not project your experience,** which takes experience in feeling the difference between the two !

And consciousness.

Yes, and consciousness. **So to be a Flow teacher is to be an ongoing student of Observing the Flow.** Of yourself, of the seasonal rhythms. That's why I think Ayurveda is a central practice for teachers , and maybe we'll get into that later. These kinds of sensitivities determine the ritual of the class and we are giving people tools that are universal and stabilizing no matter where anyone is in the Flow, such as sounding Om, such as entraining with the breath through the use of the first arm movements of Surya Namaskara...

Linking the breath to the body.

Yes. Those are universal tools that will always set the flow. But observations as to whether people seem tired or scattered or tense are part of Svadyaya, self observation both for yourself and the class. The rhythmic observations help you create the body of the class, in choosing how long you are in the lunar and solar cycles , with what your emphasis is. You may come with a certain theme or pilgrimmage of sequences, but in order for that to be fresh and alive in the moment you have to be able to respond to these other observations. You can't know until you get to class.

Yes, everybody was on the floor yesterday!

Yes! There are some observation questions on states of being.* Some have to do with qualities, some with rhythms. Maybe we'll make a list of them later. Questions that you are observing about yourself throughout the day, and observations of your students.

It starts with yourself.

Yes, it starts with what you are observing in yourself.

So you have to trust that you are a part of the whole!

And then the basic principle we use as Hatha practitioners, as Flow practitioners, as students of Tantra and Classical Yoga , is that in the Union of Opposites, **whatever arises in your observations, the opposite is always the tool for balancing that, or answering that.**

Opposites as a balancing tool.

Sometimes it involves cross fertilization, as in if you notice that you feel scattered, the opposite of something that moves in many directions is something that moves in one direction. You need to pause in that moment and create stillness, focus and stability. Sometimes within polarity, it's not that something needs its opposite but that it needs to surrender fully within the mandala of Yin and Yang, within the mandala of *Ha* and *Tha*, solar and lunar. If you find that you are slightly fatigued, move towards circulation and generate energy, or surrender towards the lunar, towards the yin , and recieve your energy through stillness. So it's not that always and every time, the opposite is the answer.

People have resistence sometimes, to going fully into the one direction or the other. Even when they' re working very dynamically, sometimes they're holding something back, and you have to give them permission to go forward. What does it mean to feel how much power you have in your legs? To really give them permission to fully explore the opposite. But it's always been in relationship. Even if you go into one direction. Say you tell people to deeply surrender to the relaxation , sometimes I remind them that they are charging their batteries, and that the winter brings spring. Stillness is the place from which the energy then rises . We all know that when we do restorative poses, we have a sense that we are restoring ourselves so that we can then move back into activity with greater balance. It's within the context of the Yin and the Yang. Even when you know that you're working to your maximum potential , it's because you know that eventually you're going to go into Savasana. It holds the space. But without that awareness of the opposite, that moment of effort or surrender, the movement in the other direction is less rich, less deep. There 's a relationship.

And these fluctuations happen within a certain amount of time. You know you're going to have to exert, and you know you're going to have to surrender, and each has its power because of the other. So everything comes in a timely fashion.

Right. Like the day. The reason we're working now is that we know the night's coming. We'll be tired. And we surrender to sleep because we know we're going to wake up. We know we' re not dying. We know we' re not going to not wake up again.

Nothing is lasting forever here. The work isn't lasting, etc. So we bow to the cyclical nature of all things.

Exactly. If you're a student of Flow, you're a student of cycles and rhythms and harmony and balance, as well as creativity and chaos.

So you begin to trust the process that everything is a process! There's a lot of trust involved.

And you get skillful around process.

Yes, skill around process, instead of outcomes.

Thank you , Sea.

Embodying The Flow

Part Two: The Pilgrimage of the Class

Shiva: In Yoga when you go on a pilgrimage , it's called a *Tirta Yatra*. *Tirta* means a sacred place, and *Yatra* is the journey. I've always been inspired by reading the Classical Hatha Yoga texts, like in the *Shiva Samnita* where the whole understanding of the outer pilgrimage is taken internally. India is covered with pilgrimage destinations. There's the whole vision of the earth of India as being the body of the Goddess. Of there being thousands of places on her body that are sacred.

Sea: Wow! Right. Pop! (Sea plants invisible flags.)

Right. And the main rivers are the *Yamuna, the Ganges, and the Saraswati*, the underground river.

The invisible river. See? I know one or two things.

Yes, I know just one or two things too! So between the two of us, we know four things!

I know one or two, you know four thousand!

No, I know so little , it's just incredible.
The rivers are considered to be her blood , -the prana, the juice.

The arteries of the body.

Yes. The *nadis* that we have in our energy body. So this gets translated in Yoga as the pilgrimage actually taking place on the inner landscape of your being. And that's where the *koshas* come into play. You're making this pilgrimage from the outermost layers of your body to the innermost layers, or to the core of your being.

From the gross to the subtle.

And this is also similar to the experience of entering a temple. You enter the outer gates, then you move closer and closer to the inner sanctum. First we have to orient ourselves on the physical layer, the *Annamaya Kosha.* Your

physical body.

A good place for a human to start. With this. (Sea pats her arm, her body.)

Yes. Right here. The flesh.

Then you get connected with your Body of Breath, the *Pranamaya kosha*. Then we start to become aware of our breath, *Ujayii*. Then as *ujayii* comes alive, you find that your body of awareness, the *Manomaya kosha* also starts to become more present and less divided.

Is that the mental body?

It's the mental body, but it's also the intelligence body, the experience of organizing consciousness. Very different from old thinking mind, or the mind influenced by *vrittis*, the distracted mind.

And that includes the body and the breath?

Well, it's a little bit like Russian dolls, and it's not exactly literal, but it's a way of describing that we have these different dimensions of ourselves that seem separate, but can become integrated. One of the purposes of Hatha Yoga is to make a pilgrimage towards your innermost self, but it's through the body, through the breath, through your consciousness and towards your wisdom body, and then getting to move even closer towards the *Anandamaya kosha,* the core of Bliss.

The whole concept of *Titra Yatra* relates to your experience of the Body as Temple and you find a parallel in the way the people enter into temples, into shrines , the way that they go on pilgrimages .

Pilgrims have deep connections or 'pulls' to their destinations, which is a very different perspective from " Well, I guess I have to make this journey, I guess I have to go to the store today, I have to go visit my in-laws." There are certain ways that we move through space , having to go places we don't want to go, or engaging in some kind of mundane movement that is absolutely in contrast to the intensity that pilgrims have when they make their journey. This is something that they' ve been waiting all their lives to do.

We spent some time in Kathmandu, and my favorite thing was to wake up really early in the morning, four or five A.M., and watch the women make their

way through their local space with their *puja* tray , with the *cumcum* powder and the flowers, and go to all the different shrines in their neighborhood to make offerings. That was their morning pilgrimage, their morning circuit.

They made a daily pilgrimage.

A daily pilgrimage, yes. So Hatha Yoga is like that daily pilgrimage for us. This idea was instrumental in shifting my relationship to being embodied. And it also really highlighted the idea that is present for us in Western culture, that sometimes we have an objectified relationship to our bodies. The most obvious examples are “Abs of Steel,” or “ Buns of Steel,” where our goals are very externalized and the motivation is about how it looks. Of course, it feels good to have strong abs. But how it looks has to do with how someone else is perceiving us. Underneath that you can find a motivation that isn’t always coming from a loving relationship to your body, but from some dislike or disgust or something. It’s very clear that in our culture we have huge body image issues. In the somatic world, you’d call it an objectified image of yourself.

Would that mean identifying yourself more as a body? Thinking that the most important aspect of the identity is the way the body looks?

Well, it relates back to the time when people had some kind of illness, and they just wanted a pill to fix it. It has to do with a kind of mechanistic world view, like the way we view the earth is the same way we view the body. “What can I get out of this? If it’s not working , how can I fix it? ” And it bypasses an experience of your body, or of the earth , as sacred. It sounds simple and idealistic , but if you really investigate this kind of historical or cultural conditioning that has to do with the advertised images that you see while growing up, they’re very different from some of the images that you see now of someone who’s doing Hatha yoga in the mountains . It’s almost like their body is in some kind of a prayer. The ratio of those kinds of images to those of a kind of externalized version of our bodies is very small. Striving for an external perfection- what does that actually feel like inside? Ballet dancers and people involved in body building start to feel like their body is a machine.

Or a kind of armor, which I’m seeing in my healing work.

Yes. We have to address the inner life of the body. And I don’t want to generalize because on the other end of the spectrum, I think dancers become so intimate with all of these layers of their bodies because they’re expressing

from the inside out and there can be an incredible consciousness and vitality and healing quality through that expression.

The way this relates back to studying Hatha Yoga or becoming a Hatha Yoga teacher is realizing that in the yoga room, people are going to be involved with a transformation of their experience of themselves that will start and be rooted first very strongly in the experience of the body. So whatever distorted feelings they have about their body, or whatever might even be somewhat of a reality but gets fixed in their mind, such as people are stiff, or they've never felt very strong, these are going to change.

The body has its own ideas about what it is.

Yes. So to me the whole concept of pilgrimage and the Body as Temple really means to be a devotee of the Life Force , where you're consciously inviting the Life Force. For instance, it's very common if you look in your class, half the people are stiff or tight, and that's why they're there initially, and that can become a very fixed impression of one's self which reinforces the holding pattern. All these things are very important to be attuned to, particularly if you're teaching Vinyasa Flow, **because the flow can only be as great as our willingness to enter into it.** If you've ever been in a canoe with someone who is half way paddling, or kind of ...

Back paddling!

(Laughs) Or back paddling! It's okay if someone doesn't know what they're doing , but if they're enthusiastic, the energy is actually moving. And if they are enthusiastic about being in the water, so excited to be on the river, and you start paddling ... Ho! You start paddling together, and the flow comes! That metaphor relates to our job as teachers, which is to identify what resistances to the Flow are in the room. Some, as we were talking about , are a part of urban living - more like obstacles to the flow in that people start from a scattered place or they start with tension, and these are going to change. It's fine. All of this is going to change. It's nothing to get freaked out about. It's just our job. The job of the midwife is to serve the new mother and the things that arise for her. She's going to be in a contraction and she's going to get uncomfortable so you as midwife help her get comfortable. A beautiful flow starts to happen. You support her with breathing to encourage that flow. Everything is going to change.

And everything that is present is going to come up.

Yes. It is, within reason. We're not doing psychotherapy in the room, we're not doing emotional healing, but, because yoga practice is a multi-dimensional practice and because the flow of our life energy absolutely feeds every dimension of ourselves and is hindered or liberated by every dimension of ourselves, if we are a student of flow , we are a student of all of these things. So having said that, we don't have to address these things in a heavy handed , lecturing, direct way. I actually have found it's more effective to indirectly address some of these disembodied states that we encounter, or limitations of our body image .

I start from an intention of honoring the Body as Temple, or honoring the sacred landscape of the body. From the beginning I am completely honoring everybody as a divine embodiment. The way I touch them, if I adjust them, will be respectfully. In the way I will address parts of their body, they will hear a sense of benevolence or reverence, so...

They may not even know that they're being honored.

And it doesn't mean that the language is very sensuous, or very soft toned. In a dynamic flow, say in Virabhadrasana 3, I'm talking to that back leg as a square dance caller, and I'll say " Lift that beautiful back leg! " You know? It can be very strong and vibrant language but there's never a sense of degradation or violation or imposition or bossiness towards the body.

Or judgment.

Exactly. That helps people relax around however it is that they're defining themselves: if they're tired, if they're stiff, if they feel weak, toxic, whatever! Or if they're feeling wonderful! Particularly to the men who are stiff, for instance, I might suggest they think of their father doing yoga, or suggest that in their family lineage, they're probably the most flexible person who's come around for the last thousand years! In other words, you don't have to directly say, "Oh, the stiff people, I know this is hard !" It's just to bring whatever is natural to you. **But get very clear on your relationship to your body, and to being in a body centered practice, and to how you relate to other people's bodies.** When we say body, we are talking about where the soul meets the body . Wholeness . Conscious, living , and dynamic, not body as object.

So, come back to Yoga as a practice of Pilgrimage. When we go on pilgrimage, usually it's to a place we haven't been before and there's a feeling sense of where you're being directed to, but what happens between when you begin and when you arrive is, as we know, the process oriented part. That's where the transformations are occurring.

All of the asanas, in a way, are like different pilgrimages unto themselves. Urdhva Danurasana, or any of the back bends, are very sacred pilgrimages to the center of the heart. Very, very deep opening into the inner sanctum of the heart. Or for me, in hip openers, it's like going down to the delta, the sacred cave of the body. The feeling tone is very different in every part of the body. In the Tantric world there are thousands of chakras besides the main 7 or 8, and the chakras in themselves are also pilgrimages.

I love the idea of honoring each asana as a pilgrimage in itself because it points to the necessity of being present in every moment in the hour and a half pilgrimage, and honoring each moment. That's a great intention for a student.

And for me if you're doing a daily practice, there's that famous saying by H.Y. Pradapika about Hatha Yoga, something along the lines of " Hatha Yoga is not for the weak! " When you're involved in a transformational practice that is challenging, just as any pilgrimage that has any spiritual power to it, there's usually some difficulty in getting there.

One of the pilgrimage places for me is Mt. Kailash in Western Tibet. It takes two weeks to get there, then once you get there you circumambulate it more around the mountain. At one point you're up to 18, 000 feet. No one is allowed to climb Mt. Kailash, because it's an Abode of Shiva . It's like a huge lingum and it's also sacred to the Buddhists. The parallel in Hatha Yoga practice is that we can live our lives and roll up our sleeves and embrace every challenge with this idea of " a battle to fight and win, win, " or the internal attitude of the pilgrim as one who is deeply humble to the privilege of making the journey. When I see different pilgrims, particularly Tibetans making prostrations, or walking, or Christians crawling on their knees, it seems like a total surrender to the process.

I take refuge in my practice. As much as possible. Of course, there are days when it feels like, "Okay , I'm going to sustain my practice, this is what I'm biting off today." It's like our meals, sometimes we're eating it and tasting it and savoring it and sometimes we have this half hour in between and we're just

eating. Just eating. Not that there's a drum roll around every practice, but when I use this metaphor of being the pilgrim and Hatha Yoga as an ongoing pilgrimage towards both the inner core of my being and devotion towards Life, the swell of my practice feels rich and wild , like anything could happen.

Yeah, it's like a jungle. Not just a landscape.

Rather than Orange County where all the trees are the same height, and pretty predictable.

Funny that we're talking about the earth.

I live for the inspired meeting of creative evolution, of the creative energies inside myself. When I feel that unfurling, some new discovery in my body, or it's not always new ; perhaps it's deepening some experience of myself, or of an asana, or when the dam, - that place of tightness opens, it's like a baby fern unfurling.There's no restriction to the flow. But to not be freaked out when there are restrictions.

I was just thinking at first we were talking about taking refuge in the practice, and then you kind of moved to this place of living for the flame and fanning it when it comes, and it's almost like you're saying that you have to begin by taking refuge in your practice, and when you allow yourself to become completely immersed, then perhaps you see a flame, and you go towards it.

Well, yes. I think part of the reason why you take refuge to begin with is that you feel that there is some flame that is there.

You've been saying that a lot in class lately , "Take refuge in your practice," so I wanted you to talk about that a little more.

Do you know what I mean ? You don't just surrender to something unless we can feel that there's something there.

Believe me, I understand!

Yeah , whether it's a person you fall in love with ..., we know! Like my cat Choochie. He sniffs something out - he won't just eat anything !

That's why we show up on our mats ! We know there's something good to

eat !

That's also our job, to share how we're inspired by this practice. I think we have a wonderful, artistic role in transmitting Yoga because part of the role of the artist, whether it be in dance, music, visual arts, is to inspire, to breathe life into something. You could really lose a beginner if your teaching is dry, and overly technical. I've had people say to me " My first experience with Yoga didn't inspire me, didn't move me." It doesn't mean that we're constantly emoting, and trying to uplift people. But it means to be very authentic to the moment.

Sometimes my inspiration comes from getting so real, just speaking about how crazed we are that day, or how pooped we are that day. Inspiration is like a wind. It can only move through something that's there. That's why we have to start with ourselves.

This idea of authenticity is very essential! So powerful if you're going to be teaching from a truthful place. Otherwise, you're just acting like a teacher, how you think a teacher should act !

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah ! Exactly ! And we're still animals. We can smell a pile of poop! We all know when we hear a teacher saying the cliches of Yoga. That's why I want to encourage teachers sooner rather than later to not be burdened by the technical responsibility of Yoga in their language. Not necessarily in your sequencing. In your sequencing you need to be responsible. Not burdened, responsible. And that of course translates into our language. But so many teachers have so much anxiety in the beginning. Not necessarily teachers that I've worked with, but so many teachers come to me and feel concerned as to whether they're teaching the right thing, or because of that concern they just teach one or two things because they feel safe within those parameters. That's why I think <u>your</u> metaphorical life, the metaphors that we already know and we come to yoga with and get ignited in our yoga practice are the compost for this fertile , sacred relationship to the body. You continue to feed and nourish your experience. It can't just come from somebody elses' experience, it has to come from <u>yours</u>.

And I'm also remembering what a teacher of mine said which was that if everybody only taught what they have already mastered, then nobody would be teaching anything. Because there's also that which we know and feel that is authentically a part of our body of knowledge. In other words, you can have faith in what you have to offer even if you're just aiming at it and in process with it and it feels true for you. Even if you haven't quite gotten there yet, you can still

be putting forth ideas to people about going up the mountain even though you haven't achieved the mountain top.

Yeah, yeah, yeah! Right. You can be a pilgrim on the path and not yet gone to the top of the mountain, but you're on the path.

You're on the path, and that's a rich place to draw from.

Absolutely. I mean you can still teach Baddha Konasana even if your knees aren't touching the ground. It's okay. In the pilgrimage of the body, though, it brings to mind why sometimes a yoga teacher's calling card is a photo of themselves doing an asana... it shows which sacred centers in the body have been opened or activated. If you really look at teachers who've been teaching a long time- I don't even have this in my chest 'cause I haven't been teaching for thirty years yet- there's something that happens to the yogic rib cage over a long long time.

It opens.

Right, And that's just not something that's going to born in five years or ten years. Thirty years.

Rod has it. (Rod Stryker, of Pure Yoga). He has tremendous prana.

Rod totally has it . In his chest. Prana. Absolutely.

It becomes a visible presence , what you know and what you've experienced, but it happens over time.

... So let's talk specifically now about the Pilgrimage of the Class, the way that we set up the journey of the class.

Well, in Classical Hindu Temple architecture, there's the gates to the temple, and you walk into that, and the you're inside the temple compound. It's called the middle courtyard. And then you pass through some more gates towards the inner sanctum. And sometimes you have to pass through several different structures to actually go to the inner sanctum, but let's keep it simple. You pass through the gates, and then you're in the courtyard, and you pass through another gate and then you're in the inner sanctum.

Now we can use that structure in terms of Yoga class. As people enter into the room, we want the atmosphere to feel like they're entering into a transforming space. That's the first ritual of being on a pilgrimage. A demarcation of space, and that also relates to taking refuge in the practice. There's a tangible sense of entering into a sanctuary even though we want that feeling of the sanctuary inside ourselves , and even though that sense of sanctuary is not separate at all from the outside world. It's not like " Psst ! It's safe in here! " and " Oooo! Danger outside! " You know ? " Oooo! Evil, toxic outside! Oooo! "

You're scarin' me !

I'm saying it's not an escapist reality. It's a natural, ancient experience that comes from the world, of needing an interior space which is really devoted towards the Essence .

I hate to interrupt you but I'm having a revelation.

Yes, ma'am.

It's like a temple within a temple within a temple, and then the practice is the temple and the asana is the temple and then of course life is the temple we enter into from birth and...

Right, right. Exactly. So that's the thing. Entering the first gate is the classroom, and then you're in the courtyard of the Temple, and the role of the teacher is to help usher people in towards the inner sanctum , which is inside them, inside their hearts. That's from the Upanishads. The inner sanctuary is inside you. Again , you can carry this very same feeling into any class you teach, even if you are teaching Corporate America ! If you listen to the symphony it very much has the same structure. This is classic transformational structure and you can use many different metaphors to describe it.

Elaborate on the Corporate America idea.

Say you're teaching a class at Apple. You don't have to say (hushed tones) "Everyone ! Enter into this temple! Feel the inner sanctum of the heart! " That's not going to be their language! And this might not be your metaphor at all but it's helpful to know that Yoga comes out of these deep archtypal structures.

Even the architectural structure of a temple is considered like a body, where the gates are the feet , the tower is the head, and the inner sanctum is the heart. So we're talking about this an archtypal structure of the divine body, but you can use your own metaphor. The metaphor that we use in Vinyasa Flow is of a river, lake, or ocean. You're on the banks of the river. We've all had the experience where you're about to jump into a glacial lake and you hesitate. And maybe you don't jump in that day ! That feeling sucks. When we don't have enough guts to jump in. It's our role as a teacher to help people into that process. Jump into the Flow ! Jump in ! It's refreshing !

When I went tandem sky diving, I had a great teacher. He kept saying "You're gonna love this ! " We're in the plane at 14, 000 feet and our knees are starting to shake and we were wanting to get really freaked about it. And they kept saying "You're gonna love this! " And I kept wanting to pray and make some big ceremony and when it was time to go I wanted to sit at the door and pray some more, and he just said "No, you just count one two three, here we go! " You know? It's our role to remind people that entering into the flow is very natural. It's our birthright! It's not something exotic. To be in a sense of grace and of being moved is something we've known since we were children. It's something that business people know, - we've already gone through the list: athletes, jazz musicians, dancers. In every spectrum, if you're thriving, you're in Flow. Doesn't matter what activity.

Not everyone has a perception of that flow as being something sacred. When you say " sacred ," all of a sudden it sets up "oh well, here's the sacred, here's the profane. " Sacred has to do with the fact that at the foundation of that experience or that vibration is a recognition or reflection of the Essence. Everything is an Emanation of the One, so what defines something as Sacred is that it is reflecting the Essence fully. We can just drink our water like "gulp, gulp, gulp, we're thirsty!" Or we take the water slowly and there's this recognition that this is absolutely sustaining us to be alive. We drink it in and we receive it with every part of our body. That becomes a kind of sacred experience. The Flow is permeating everything. You don't have to describe it in sacred terms, using words like "temple, architecture and pilgrimage," but your orientation towards it as a sacred experience will open you as a teacher, and it will open the flow of Yoga that comes through you to be aligned with the Essence, the Underlying Essence.

Talk about "The Essence. "

The One Who Creates Us All. Om is the underlying essence.

When you say the Essence, you're saying That Which Beats our Hearts...

The indivisible Core, yes. The Indivisible Core, the Life Force.

It occurs to me that the modern, Western fear based mind- not to point the finger and go " Modern Western Fear Based MIND! " seems to be conditioned to stop before a rite of passage as if something needs to be prepared ... What is so distinctive about you, - and I say this as an old friend - what is so amazing about you is that you have embraced Flow as the natural way of being, and that the stoppings have become unnatural now. But what I think we are all surrounded by in life is a sense of stopping a lot and then taking pause and going "Hmm, I don't know." What you're promoting here is that there are constant rites and passages and we have the option of flowing through them without stopping .

We don't need to prep ourselves, we don't need to stop ourselves, we can be invited into the next rite of passage joyfully, have it be an experience of Flow ... maybe this is too tangential.

Only thing to me is that rites of passage are pretty huge, and flow is a daily rhythm that culminates around certain transitions.

Right but you're talking about jumping out of a plane and you kind of want to make a reverential gesture or ritual, a bow to a new beginning ... There's some stopping before the rite of passage where you're leaving that life, where there was no jumping out of planes ...

Right, right ! Well, in terms of teaching and in terms of teaching Flow at the beginning of the pilgrimage of the class, the beginning is very important, and you have to feel that it is natural , it's what you always know, so you don't freak out if everyone's not in sync or entrained in the beginning, but there's a very clear attending to getting people to enter into the flow. You're a Temple Guide and everyone gets through the gates. And once you're in the middle courtyard and you see people fidgeting or looking around, then it's your job to find the language pertinent to each person and say it in different ways. So you're in the temple gates, or you've pushed off the river with our raft metaphor, and you're starting to paddle, - go back to that person we spoke of earlier, who's kind of looking down the river going " O , did I make the right decision to go down the river? " or more likely in a yoga class the mind thinks about where it

came from or is not yet fully present, so our job is to encourage people into the flow, encourage them into the flow.

How do we encourage people to pass through the gates and enter?

The beginning of a class is very important. The way you enter the temple gates can set up the entire flow.

So the ways to enter the gates: you can use chanting, you can use visualization, you can actively call people into some kind of intention or dedication in the beginning. You can put them into certain asanas which are reflective by nature, which include *tadasana* because that creates some centering by just standing, and is a simple call to presence. You can use a prostration on the belly, or some other forward bend, like *utanasana* with the knees bent, or a simple cross legged position to shift the attention inward towards the journey towards their Flow.

You can use music. I'll have specific pieces of music that I use very specifically as " entering into the gate "kind of music. You want music that has a kind of invocation quality to it, such as Om, or Jai Uttal's Chanting. Even if it's not actually chanting, you can hear and feel that it's a beginning, a calling down of the spirit. Within Tantra and Vedic ceremony, that's the first thing you do, you call down the Life energy, whether it's through a specific deity, like invoking Ganesh, the destroyer of obstacles. That ritual beginning is very important and using those tools also goes back to what we were talking about in the beginning- to inspire in the early stages what your orientation is towards Yoga. Sometimes I'll use rhythmic music right in the beginning if it's a more solar class. Again, I don't want to strictly typify for myself or for anyone else what the texture and feeling of that moment is going to be, because then we would be starting to 'fix' something that is relating to the infinite.

And you don't want to fix something infinite!

No! You want to be as open as possible, yes.

Doesn't that require that you sometimes ignore where a tamasic state presents itself and everyone is kind of crashed out on the floor ? You have to say to yourself "Ok, that's what it is but I'm going to set the tone in a different direction."

Yes, and we could go on and on and on regarding different feng shui remedies in the beginning of class - in fact, let's just list them.

Okay.

If you come in and you see that people are very fatigued you have two choices: you can nourish their need for stillness, or you can use the dynamic opposite, but not harshly. You call people to standing, you don't start on the floor. You feel it. You think " Boy , if we start on the floor, we're never going to get up. " If it's a very heavy feeling, start standing. If the feeling is that it's been a very charged day and people are trying to settle themselves, to ignore that may actually disrupt the potential of the flow, so you have to be very sensitive to this. Sometimes if you're teaching an evening class when people are coming from work, people aren't that settled. They're still coming in late. It's up to you if you want to create boundaries where no one can enter after five or ten minutes later.

I tend to be fairly open about these kinds of things. When we're about to sound Om, the door is shut and no one is walking in when we're sounding Om. If it's just before, I allow people to come and enter into the door and just stand there and do Om , because I'd rather they have that experience. I think it's more disruptive to walk in after the Om and have to settle yourself. If you're right there, right on the cusp, come on in, sound Om and then we can lay down the mats! In that case, if we are trying to get settled and at the same time I'm trying to initiate this feeling of going into the gates, I call upon people's skill. I use it as a Yoga Wisdom -in -Action moment. I call upon people's skill to learn how to keep an inner stability while allowing the room to get settled. So even though the room is getting settled, I invite people to feel that you can actually have that polarity of adding your sense of inner stability while things are changing. You don't have to have that sense of "Oh, I can't get stable till everything's settled." No! You can be connecting to your stability as things are stabilizing.

I guess that's what I was saying before about stopping before the big rites of passage begin, that sense of " Okay, we're starting NOW! ". We have to instead continually ***allow*** *and* ***include*** *within reason, and know that that's a human skill that we need to cultivate.*

Right.

You teach that very well!

And as people are moving their mats, to promote the good karma of making space for someone to do yoga. To diffuse as much irritation and a territorial type of attitude as soon as possible - this may only be in L.A.! Or New York. You may not find it as much in middle America.

No- it's human.

But the idea is, be aware. Sometimes at the beginning of a class you're going to find that you're going to have to mitigate things. Navigate the flow. When you push off the dock, there's choppy waters, and you have to attend to it to get past the break into smoother waters.

So if you're a teacher of Flow , attending to the beginning is very important.

You're also teaching people how to transition.

Yes, Vinyasa Flow is very much about transition.

Transitioning gracefully while allowing others to maybe go at their own pace a little bit, to include other paces.

Absolutely. And I think our ancestors had a lot more perspective in a way, about what they let rattle them, and there were alot more manners in place and not this huffy puffiness towards strangers that you sometimes find even in a Yoga studio. Even in the way Yoga students relate to staff. And again, maybe this is an L.A. experience, but...

It's a modern urban experience probably.

Yes. And you want to say " Everyone, relax a little bit here!"

Take the chill pill!

You know, have a wider sense of what's important. Not to chastise people, because sometimes I've actually been in classes where teachers are actually chastising people about their cell phones or about being late or any number of issues. **My teaching style is to diffuse the small irritations, rather than highlight them.** Let the small things be small,

and the things that are important, let's bring our attention to those! Even with cell phones. People know that they're not supposed to bring their cell phones to class, but things happen. I don't actually have a problem with it in my class. It's very rarely that they go off.

The only time was when you answered the phone. That was so funny! I think you said "She's in Yoga class. She'll call you later."

Right, right, but to make benevolent jokes about the small irritations is modeling for people about what you're saying: transitions, irritations, etc. Diffusing doesn't mean belittling, or you know, when you sit in traffic, being reactive, but Vinyasa Flow as it relates back to Patanjali's first sutra." *Yoga citta vritti nirodah. "* Yoga is the stilling of the fluctuations of the mind.

Most of the fluctuations of the mind are caused by our reactions to our experiences, so in a way, in Vinyasa Flow we are really refining our nervous system towards being less reactive. We have greater stamina, but also sensitivity and subtleness and adaptability. You find in the health systems of Taoism and Ayurveda and oriental medicine, the ideal state of health is one that is adaptive. Adaptive doesn't mean so crude that anything can happen and nothing phases you. But it does mean that you have, in your choices of your food, not only the food you eat but what you listen to or put into your brain, that you've actually taken care of yourself well enough while not isolating yourself from life, and that you can be in many different situations and be a pillar of peace rather than adding to disruption. You're actually diffusing disruption.

Obviously it's the mark of your passage into a higher level of evolution that your perception as to what irritates you begins to change dramatically. Like the Buddhist monk Bernard Glassman, the roshi, says , and I paraphrase "Don't go out to that which aggravates you, make sure it's coming in to you..." But we spend a lot of time running towards what bothers us.

Right. Right.

So all that calms after you change your perspective a little.

Right. So in a way the body of the class is this middle courtyard of the temple. The passage into the inner sanctum is the creative part of the class because it depends on the variables we spoke about earlier : seasons, the *bhava* of the class, the mood of the class- not that you're always catering to

everybody's whim, but you can see definite cycles before the new moon, between the new moon and full moon, full moon to new moon, winter versus summer and spring, and transitions between seasons.

In the middle body of the class is where you come in tune with both your intuitive and disciplined intelligence , and what you want to teach that day ,then you get ready to interact with What Is. When you try to figure out what you're going to teach that day, it's going to be a combination of intuition and disciplined intelligence and what I mean by that is **you have a responsibility as the guide to take people some place, not that we're going anywhere.**

With a midwife, the mother is not asking you to be there to help her stay in the contractions, she's asking you to help her move from the first contractions towards dilation towards giving birth. We're all there for Yoga for many different reasons , even if we're just there to dwell more in our **Being** state. There's a disciplined intelligence in the approach to Being. Even if someone had no goal, there'd be a Vinyasa about the No Goal. You would choose alot of stillness.

Meditation.

Meditation, restorative poses. A restorative type of practice, a Being type of practice. Very little external movement. But if someone is interested in this evolution of their being in consciousness on all the different levels, then many different openings will occur, which for me is the constant model of a chambered nautilus...

A chambered nautilus?

Yes. A chambered nautilius, like a shell, where this little sea creature has a tiny chamber for itself and it keeps building bigger and bigger chambers . So for me our life long pilgrimage plus our smaller life pilgrimage of doing this practice over the years is that the asanas are the experience of creating greater and greater spaces within ourselves to inhabit. You go from a simple backbend, to cobra, to the more complex scorpion. The experience of that is a very profound experience of opening, and you don't just go from cobra to scorpion, there are lots of stages between them, and the whole metaphor of pilgrimage also anchors that evolution so that it's not just external asana performance but is the intimate experience of yourself ...

Increasing...

...Expanding , but at the same time becoming deeper, you know? Becoming stronger but also juicier.

Embodying the Flow

Part Three: The Ritual and the Wave of the Class

Shiva: Here are some practical elements of leading a class that can enhance the flow...

THE ROOM AS RITUAL CONTAINER

If possible, be in the room earlier than the students arriving to set up these elements of room ambiance. These are the ambient points that you will play with during the class to enhance the flow.

LIGHTS

Bright lights are not conducive to flow. They are good for a lecture format, when you need to hold people's mental attention. In Flow we're trying to find the balance between internal and external states of consciousness. Find the setting of the lights that allows for wakefulness and a sense of mood or bhava, that allows them to connect intimately with themselves.

THE PLACEMENT OF THE MATS

Different possibilities. Either two rows facing each other with a river down the middle - excellent when the class is less than twenty. Set your mat up either in the middle on one side of the rows, or at the top of one side of the row. This allows for a community sense of feeling.

If your students are all facing one direction, find the most inspired place to face forward. For me it's facing towards the greatest light. If there are mirrors, I believe it's ideal to not be facing them, unless you are using them as a teaching tool for flow.

PROPS

If you are going to use props, it's helpful to have people get them at the very beginning of the class, rather than in the middle for Flow. So have them get whatever they need, including blankets for shoulder stand, straps , blocks, at the beginning. You can suggest to beginners to get a block and a strap, which they can use for standing poses or forward bends.

SOUNDING OM

Your own connection to Om will also be a powerful tool for you and your students. As Om starts to resonate inside you naturally, it becomes the way that you attune your voice in the beginning of class to the experience of the Divine

speaking through you.

Sea: So many people seem to have a great deal of fear and trepidation around their own Om, and the whole idea of being vocal to some students is very unusual. People aren't used to speaking out loud....

That's why it's so powerful.
If you are teaching where it doesn't feel appropriate to start Om in the beginning of class, you can Om in the car before your class, but it's very important , I feel , to begin a deep and authentic relationship to Om as the underlying vibration of Creation.

There are ways to introduce Om to underline that it's universal. Mention that Om is a sound that you can hear in all of creation , including modern technology, such as refridgerators and airplanes. They make great Oms.

Starting with the three sounds of Om : A, U, and M, is another way of getting people comfortable with the sound.

The more comfortable you are, the more comfortable other people will be.

Using the Sea of Oms, so the sound comes in and out, in and out, also allows people a sense of the beauty of Om. This is an opportunity for an unusual moment in most people's 21st century life, of just being in sound together. This sound is not even carrying an overt meaning, but is connected to the underlying vibration and that's where the meaning is.

You can also invite people to chant Om internally, which is a very powerful experience of allowing the sound to resonate inside you.

THE FLOW OF MUSIC

It's nice to play music as people are entering, then turn it off for the opening chant. It's always good for the opening piece of music to have a sacred orientation .This allows people to feel the beginning of the pilgrimage of their practice. If you're teaching in a setting where you don't feel comfortable using chanting, then any simple rhythm, any kind of evocative music is also appropriate for the beginning. Anything that allows people to begin to syncopate and invites people to enter. Anything that invokes the beginning of entraining.

For Surya Namaskara, the music in the beginning doesn't have to be strong and dynamic. Sometimes the contrast of very peaceful music while you're doing a very dynamic practice is really beautiful. It has a cross fertilizing

quality. It's talking to your nervous system. But in an urban setting, dynamic music in the beginning , after a period of some invocation music, inspires people. It awakens their rhythmic nature, their rhythmic nature, their community/ tribal/celebratory nature.

And so it's good to have a sense of how long you want to be in the first wave of the dynamic flow, and to literally count three or four songs towards your peak . Have a sense of how many minutes that is, whether it's going to be fifteen, 20, 30, 40 minutes till you get to your first peak.

How many peaks are there?

That's up to you, but I'd say in every class there's at least two peaks, sometimes three or four.

You're talking about from beginning to end?

Yes. (See Sequencing Classes.) So after your first peak in the Sun Salutations, you want to play the kind of music that is balancing.

Invocation, heat and then balance.

Yes, and that's where you begin to make your transition towards your standing pose sequence. This is a classic Flow.

Then you have your standing pose sequence. You start to know that whatever you do in your own practice, it's going to be about a third longer when you teach it. So know that when you're doing the standing pose sequence in your own practice and it's thirty minutes, when you teach it, it's going to be forty or forty-five minutes. If it's twenty minutes in your own practice, when you teach it, it's going to be thirty, thirty -five minutes. It's always longer than your own practice because you're having to lead people, and sometimes demonstrate.

So in your standing poses, you do the same thing . Slowly feel the music. The music usually flows from more mellow to more vibrant, more strength. Then if you're going into backbends, you can have the music get more introspective, or more introspective to more dynamic again.

Sometimes it's nice, for the lunar period , to have a whole other CD that's just lunar music because you can't exactly tell when you want to switch to that on your own CDs. That takes you towards Shavasana. It's also nice to have special music that's just for Shavasana.

In terms of music, I rarely use music that has english spoken words , because I find it drives people's attention towards the lyrics, but on the contrary , if there's a very powerful piece of music that you can understand the words to and you play that every now and then, that can be very inspiring. You know your

own student base. If they are not oriented towards Flow music or instrumental music, then it's your call.

You have to follow your own instinct. Don't feel that you have to use music and/or don't be attached to your music ! Inevitably, there will be some situation where the stereo is broken, or your CDs will be left in the other bag, and this is a test to see if your teaching relies on your music, or if the music enhances your teaching. It's best if the music enhances your teaching and the Flow. The Flow is not depending upon any one variable that could disrupt the Flow. Ideally , we 're very adaptive. The teaching of Vinyasa Flow is to learn how to connect to the Flow in all situations.

Also, silence is golden. You can have a class that's primarily silent, and you can use music in the beginning and the end. You can have a class that's primarily music with periods of silence. When you're doing a concentrated period of arm balances, or poses that require partner work such as handstands, silence is best because of the level of interaction and concentration required.

Trust your intuition as to whether the music is enhancing the Flow, or beginning to be just background noise.

Always gently turn up the volume and gently fade away.

Listen to the feedback of your students regarding the music you choose.

If you have any doubts about your projection, just casually ask " Can everyone hear me?" Or " Can you hear me in the back? " to adjust your volume.

VOICE IN THE FLOW

When I first started teaching, no one could hear me. Some of you are blessed with voice training, singing, acting, or public speaking skills, but for most of us, learning to project while staying connected to our heart is an art.

Be true to who you are. You will know that you're in your authentic voice when words flow off your tongue. You don't have a sense of having to think about what the next sentence is.

Always speak to the farthest person in the room to allow your voice to project.

Be aware of the additional teaching that can be contained in your voice. You can bring different qualities to whatever instruction you're giving . If you speak with a soft tone, you're inviting more of feeling mind : sensuousness, introspection , tenderness, - the qualities of the heart. If you speak very clearly and directly, you're inviting a sharpening of attention and focus. When you speak slowly, you're inviting people to slow down. Sometimes our voice picks

up because there's so many details to transmit over people moving through postures. Be aware if you're rushing and if that's being transferred into your voice.

Try to keep a steady , underlying rhythm in your voice. Up the volume of your voice like an exclamation point when you are in the peaks of your classes, or when people are in a difficult pose, and you want to emphasize the importance of maintaining the action or awareness. For example,in Vira 3, to encourage maintaining the lift of the back leg , you could chant with a strong voice " Keep the back leg alive! Keep the back leg buoyant ! " as if you are a midwife, and the baby's about to be born. And you're using the voice very naturally and authentically.

Like saying "Don't drop the baby! "

Yeah , or "A few more pushes! "

Lightness and humor in your voice. This takes time unless you're a natural comic . Don't feel the pressure to be funny in your class. If you are open to the spontaneous interaction that occurs in every class, your humor will come naturally .

Using people's names in class can be very empowering for that person as well as creating a sense of community.

Gradually integrate saying the names of your students into the class.

The only thing that I would censor is if there's any anger, anxiety, judgement, or self rightousness in your voice, which can be expressed in a tone as much as in words.

You can direct people through your voice, through your touch, and through demonstration.

In a Flow class, look for the appropriate opportunities for giving adjustments, so as not to inhibit the flow of the entire class.

Scan the room . Be aware of people's body mechanics more acutely in the beginning.

THE WAVE OF THE CLASS:
THE RHYTHMIC STRUCTURE OF A YOGA FLOW CLASS

The wave has to do with the essential teachings of Vinyasa, which is that You Start Where You Are, and through a progression of intelligently sequenced asanas, you arrive at your pilgrimage destination. So there are waves within waves. The archtypal structure of a wave is that it has - like Vinyasa - a starting point. It builds into the peak or the crest of a wave , and then it descends into a balance or resolution or a counterpose to the peak of the wave. You could see the entire class , no matter what the length of the time of the class, as constituting the entire wave in itself. That's the classic structure of drama , of music, etc. You can also approach so that there is not just one peak in the class, but two or three peaks in the class. Within those two or three peaks, you have a sense of the starting point , your progression , leading to a peak, and then to your descent, or counterpose.

"ONE WAVE"

Let's talk about the classic "One Wave" structure of the class.

Obviously, we mention the opening or invocation as being the pivotal starting point as to the way that you enter the flow, then you choose an actual posture that you see as the peak of the class. This peak is archtypal in that it reflects nature, in that the summer solstice is the peak of light in the day, and the period of most sunlight. In a wave , its peak is the greatest height. And so in an asana , a peak pose is the one of greatest complexity that requires the most set up to reach .

So, if you're doing a one wave class, you should have a sense of what is the peak pose that you're headed towards. If you're doing a multi -peaked class ,then for each sub-sequence, you have a sense of what that peak is. For example, what is the peak standing pose, arm balance, backbend, forward bend, etc.

In a classically structured Vinyasa Flow class, you start with the sun salutations and then you move into standing poses and arm balances on your way to back bends and then twists, forward bends, hip openers and inversions . Then to meditation, pranayama , savasana . Within any of those sections of the first part which are solar, - which means working with building heat, - you're going to have a peak within the sun salutations, and that peak would be your last sun salutation. Everything you're doing is building towards that last one.

In the standing pose sequence, it's not necessarily the last standing pose, but it's the standing pose that has the most complexity, and requires the most opening and stability in the pose, e.g. Parivrita Ardha Chandrasana or Virabhadrasana 3. The same thing with arm balances. In a beginner's class,

Bakasana could be your peak in arm balances. In an intermediate class, your peak arm balance may be Galavasana or even handstand. Your peak in your backbends is obviously your most complex back bend. Your peak in your forward bends and hip openers is your place of greatest depth. As soon as you move into the lunar section, it's not the pose that requires the most heat or preparation , but it's the place of greatest depth in terms of internal introspection and in terms of flexibility. It could be the pose that you stay in the longest. There begins the counter pose phase.

Now in an Iyengar style class, they may actually use head stand or shoulder stand as the peak of the class. That's somewhat unusual in the Vinyasa system . In Iyengar, they do fewer poses to focus on alignment, and in an hour and a half class, they may only do eight poses. It's possible to use head stand and shoulder stand as your peak in Vinyasa, but in an Iyengar class it's a more appropriate peak because they may only do standing poses, they may only do forward bends and hip openers, or arm balancing and back bends. You find in sequencing a Vinyasa Flow class that you stay closer to Ashtanga roots, and trying to have a well rounded class that draws from all of the groups of asanas , with both progressions and counter poses.

Sea: In an hour and a half class, just time wise, when do you switch into the lunar cycle?

That's about learning how to work with the clock, because this is a challenge in Vinyasa Flow.

It's a good way to shape the wave, maybe, to go by the clock.

Yes. In this you have to learn through your own practice. It's good to have a sense of when you're going to reach the zenith of your practice, if you're in an hour and a half structure, you want to peak within an hour, so that there's a half hour at least of counterposes, inversions, and Shavasana. It's good to actually give yourself markers that are based on the clock so that you know that you need to be winding down by a certain time, because you know that whatever you plan , you're going to have to inevitably let go of some poses. And that's a part of the improvisational nature of teaching. You can use the wave as a kind of map, as you're navigating the flow, to know if you're a lot farther away than you thought you were going to be to getting towards back bends, and you're going to have to really cut to the chase, and either let go of the complex pose that you thought you were heading to, or be able to think on your feet in that moment of what are the essentials that are going to take you there.

A one hour class is much different and you just pare down the sections.

Yes. So please see the sequences to have a greater understanding of how this will actually flow in a practical sense. They illustrate what the actual

poses are and describe choices of modifications.

And thus ends the Wave. The crowd roars.

Yes. Thank you. Namaste. So much more to come.

Namaste, Shiva!