

A Weekend of Transformation: Practicing With Shiva Rea at The Crossings

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My journey begins when I drive through the gate, up a hill, along a labyrinthine path; I traverse, in awe of luscious landscape. The curving road unravels like a knot, a sure metaphor for the fact that I head to The Crossings, a progressive learning center and gathering place in the Texas Hill Country. All around are tall trees, pines, wildflowers, and the aroma of nature. Every so often a lake view comes into sight. Birds and butterflies whisk alongside me. Though I don't spot other wildlife, I feel their presence. I consider the old adage "it's the journey, not the destination," thinking that if the destination is half as good as the journey, I will be a happy camper.

At last, at the top of a hill the size that most people don't believe rise in Texas, I see a group of buildings. My first impression is a cloister, as the structures seem to be placed in a formation that evokes sanctuary. Again, this makes sense, as I've come to The Crossings to immerse myself in transformation. I've arrived to attend a week-end workshop taught by yoga master Shiva Rea, the well-known Vinyasa instructor that travels the world teaching her own brand of yoga, a practice that embodies her studies of yoga, dance, Ayurvedic philosophy, anthropology, and her passion for travel. (She's been to Bali, India, Africa, Jamaica – most everywhere, really). Here, she will guide me and other participants in deepening our yoga practice to connect with our *rasa*, the spiritual nectar, that which connects us to our world, restores our essence, rejuvenates us, and helps us take yoga into every aspect of our lives.

I'm lucky to first meet Shiva in the spa. Just massaged, she glows, and though I've never seen a picture of her, I'm certain who she is. Warm, earthy, charismatic, and joyful, she embodies the essence of yoga. A certain peaceful energy flows from her. It's contagious, and I understand without every having practiced in her classroom, why she inspires yoga devotees the world over. She's real. Something marvelous exudes from her—yet she's authentic and of this world. As she tells me, when we chat by the pool later, she doesn't want to be put on a pedestal, she wants to be your “yogic usher,” she who leads you to the seat within yourself, she who points out the intelligence within, that's always been there, but couldn't be uncovered. This comes across later in the workshop as she acknowledges and connects with each person, inclusive of all and aware of everything. Rather than teaching at the front of a room like so many instructors, she moves to the center of the room, to be around the students. She is almost a student herself.

Practice with Shiva is moving meditation. All about opposites, she celebrates the muscular aspects of yoga along with the spiritual. The trust of intuition reigns. As one yogini in the class tells me, “Shiva is different because of her emphasis on rasa. Asana practice from this approach focuses my internal energy. Adjustments are still there, but now the asanas are doing me, rather than me doing the asanas.” Shiva agrees, saying our bodies know what to do; they have the information. When we awaken rasa, our practice fills with fertile life. Stagnation disappears.

It occurs to me that a Shiva workshop at The Crossings is like the marriage of two fabulous musicians in a mystical duet—each enhances the other. While there is something magical and unique about Shiva, the same can be said for this vibrant learning community in the heart of Texas. Situated on secluded land just outside Austin, the site overlooks a creek and gorgeous Lake

Travis. Conceived and created by Ken and Joyce Beck, the facility is a safe and welcoming setting to explore the spiritual path. Here, people come from near and far to take courses in healthy living, spiritual practice, the arts, holistic medicine, yoga, and dance. The design reflects the Beck's philosophy of life: the pursuit of growth, balance, and symmetry. Here, I find a theatre, a movement room, classrooms, a library, a dining hall, a gorgeous infinity edged lap pool and a spa/wellness center. Participants can stay in beautifully appointed bunkhouses or individual rooms that overlook the woods. Nourishing natural food is served in the dining hall beneath its pine cathedral ceiling, or on the deck that overlooks Lake Travis. Libations and appetizers can be enjoyed in the intimate Treehouse Café where board games and wireless Internet distract momentarily from internal musings.

Most compelling, the unique architecture sets the mood for this spiritual getaway. I love the sanctuary, located a small hike away from this university of well-being. Founded on sacred land of sorts—it is the spot the Beck's chose to camp on the evening they spent the night here to get a first feel of the land—the sanctuary honors all religions with symbols carved along its walls. Opposite style gardens, one that conveys the masculine with linear, manicured plantings, and the other, reminiscent of the feminine with rounded, voluptuous, unbridled landscaping, pays homage to the ying and yang in all of us. Throughout The Crossings, sustainable materials have been used: wood, tile, carpet, and stone—even the finishes. Wall colors reflect nature in blues and sage green and much of the furniture has been carved from reclaimed Balinese wood.

Still, what most participants rave about is The Crossings' staff itself. It's nurturing, they say, because the staff really cares. All the people who work here, whatever the job, don't really seem to be working, but involved in some great labor of love. Smiles are sincere; touches are healing. One business owner who takes

Shiva's class remarks on everybody's maturity. "They can all carry on an authentic conversation," she says. Another participant adds, "I feel like I have known these people all my life. They treat us like family."

No wonder Shiva likes to teach here. The foundation has been well laid for her soul work. Throughout the week-end, participants are awakened and transformed. New information overwhelms them in a good way. "Shiva teaches us to trust our bodies," says one participant. Another, the owner of a yoga studio herself, says, "I have been looking for a language for my practice and Shiva has given me that. This is the practical application of everything I have learned in yoga. Now, I will teach my students like this—her teachings will ripple out, affect so many people."

Most participants agree that the weekend highlight is the trance dance, a Shiva specialty. On Saturday evening we meet and begin with soft, fluid asanas to guided music. It's meditative movement, enhanced by life breaths. Soon, we hold hands in a circle. We jump, we leap, we twist, twirl, and bend to powerful world music. Yoga and dance combine into one creative flow. Shiva encourages us to go internal, to feel the sense of community, to be transformed. She guides us in being ourselves, without judgment, without fear. At last, we slow to savasana, content in knowing we are part of the family of human beings.

Practicing with Shiva at The Crossings makes a difference in our lives. At last, we know the true meaning of Vinyasa—it means unity. Through her, we find the real world within ourselves. "She's a great example for women," says one participant. "She shows us how to be our own best friend, to find approval for ourselves." She exemplifies how to bring yoga into every aspect of our being. Practicing with Shiva is peaceful, wild, challenging, and entertaining. As Shiva says, "Even having fun is a kind of yoga."

