



INTERVIEW WITH DANNY PARADISE

You come across as a free spirit, teaching yoga and travelling around the world. Do you think non-attachment is key to a happy life?

I do love to travel. I made my first journey around the world when I was 19 years old. I even came to Edinburgh on that trip and explored other areas of Scotland. I had my 20th birthday on the Isle of Skye... I recognised that year that there was a luminous and yet somewhat invisible trail around the world and you could jump on it at any time... like a conveyor belt! Years later when I learnt yoga that was a beautiful tool to allow me to travel again and come into communities around the world to pass on the teachings I had learned. Also, I play music so that was the way I had made my way around the world the first time. It fits quite well with Yoga...People are interested in Yoga everywhere and also they love music...I was early in learning the practices in the West and met old and new friends all over the world who invited me to come to introduce the teachings... As far as non-attachment...well it's different for everyone. I didn't live anywhere for many years but I suppose I was still attached to Yoga, music, the things in my luggage... I didn't need to live anywhere. I've been on the move for the last 43 years.

There's a story from the Upanishads as told by Joseph Campbell. An old crotchety Yogi came into the court of Indra - one of the Kings of the Gods- Indra was on a bit of an ego trip as he had just killed a monster named Vrtra with a thunderbolt and had saved the Earth and Universe. So Indra decided to build the biggest palace of all the Gods... The old Yogi is just wearing a waistband, and he has an umbrella made of banana leaves over his head. On his chest is a little circle of hairs with a bald spot in the middle. A boy in the court next to Indra saw him he asked what Indra was thinking... 'Hey old man, who are you, what's your name, where's your family and where's your home? What is the circle of hairs on your chest?' The old Yogi answered, 'I don't have a family and I don't live anywhere...Life is too short to have a house...This parasol

is good enough for me... I just worship Vishnu. As for these hairs on my chest, it's curious...Every time an Indra dies one hair drops out. Half of them are gone now. Pretty soon they'll all be gone...Why build a house?' When Indra heard that story he cancelled the finishing of his palace. He also left his wife, moved into the forest and became a Yogi.

I could really relate to that story, especially that 'life is too short to have a house'. Later I was invited to share a piece of land on a remote tropical island and it seemed like a very good idea. I like the Native American teaching of 'pick a sacred place and live in it!' However, I still travel most of the year teaching, playing music and exploring the world. It is a great privilege to be able to travel and of course, also teach yoga...I do like having a place to keep some books and musical instruments...Can I break all attachments? Not yet...but I can live simply and just use what I need... In the end, it's all impermanence and we have to recognise that and get ready for it in the best way we can. There's no choice. In the end, we will lose everything except our soul! So we will be in a state of non-attachment no matter what...

Do you have any creative projects on the go as you travel?

I'm constantly writing songs, recording new music and films as well as helping raise awareness of human trafficking around the world, in particular, child trafficking. I also travel with my girlfriend Nadia who is a brilliant singer and musician so we record and perform together. Concerning trafficking, I became involved with an amazing project in Thailand called 'Children of the Forest'. This is a beautiful bamboo village in the North-West Thailand area of Sangklaburi. This is an area of Thailand near the Burmese border that is notorious for child and adult trafficking for forced labour or prostitution. 150 children live at the village, go to school on the property and are protected, fed, clothed and housed. 250 children from the surrounding area come for lunch



and school each day to Children of the Forest. There are also outreach programs that support another 400 or 500 children. It's very beautiful and they are demonstrating a solution for displaced, stateless children (and adults) who exist on the borders all over the world. At Children of the Forest, the children learn skills that will make them valuable to society. It's an amazing solution to the refugee situation worldwide. Over 2 million Burmese people have crossed into Thailand without identity papers. They are not allowed to work or travel even from out of their province. And each day dozens or more are kidnapped and taken to factories or as sex workers never to be seen again. So COF provides desperately needed protection and nurturing of children in the area. I was invited there by my friends Matthew and Mary Kelly who have helped support COF since it's inception. Daniel Hopson - a social worker from the UK created 'Children of the Forest.' I taught yoga to the kids there and we played music for them as well. We also made an animated film about the situation to my song 'Love Will Rescue You' that was presented at the United Nations in New York in 2015 in a program about 'Endangered Children Worldwide'. People can see that film if they search 'Love Will Rescue You' by Danny Paradise and Matthew Kelly on YouTube. We had amazingly talented artists, photographers and musicians





from all over the world participate in this production. The animator, Céu D'Ellia, has been the animation director for Steven Spielberg and Walt Disney feature films. I'm also finishing a series of 16 recordings with friends from around the world.

You have had a strong connection to the music world, working with top musicians and creative artists such as Sting, Pearl Jam, Paul Simon, Madonna, Pavarotti, Chris Botti - the list is long - how closely linked do you think yoga and music are?

I suppose my connection to these artists comes because I've been playing music and performing my whole life as well. I met Sting through Dominic Miller, whom I recorded with in London and Cairo in the '80s, and began teaching him yoga in 1990. Dominic has been recording and performing with Sting since 1989.

All successful artists, especially those who tour the world, recognise that if they want to maintain their success they have to stay on top of their health, vitality, clarity and talent. So then they have to stay healthy through their own effort. All these artists, after being exposed to yoga, clearly saw how much the practice could boost their immune system and energy. Singers in particular love the focus yoga places on deep breath, like pranayama for example. Sting has mentioned in interviews how yoga increased his vocal abilities and strength. Yoga is also known for expanding vision, intuition and insight...all these qualities are brilliant for artists in all fields.

In this issue of Amrita, we have delved into the influence medicinal plants and drugs have on developing one's spiritual development and personal growth. Do you think that mind altering substances are a substitute for traditional techniques, or can be used alongside?

There are many opinions of this on all sides. From my experience and travels I feel that yoga is an integral part of Shamanic technologies. It's all soul work. Yoga takes effort and effort is rewarded. People have accessed these different techniques for the same reasons whether it is in the world of yoga, or Native American sweat lodges, drumming circles, chanting ceremonies, magical plant ceremonies, sun dance, vision quest, aboriginal walkabout, music etc. All the techniques recognise nature as the spiritual teacher and they are designed to access nature to help create a healing force and awareness in the psyche and body. All Shamanic practices are designed to nurture evolutionary consciousness. Also the practices are there to help people learn to communicate with the Spirit in whichever ways work for them... If you trace the origins of yoga from mythology it seems that the yogic practices developed through meditative communication with nature in Shamanic ceremonies. Some people feel the practices of yoga grew out of these meditative communications to teach individuals to have the same awareness, knowledge and healing force as different practices that were coming out of all Indigenous cultures throughout the world. The Sufi's say 'There's as many roads as there are souls of men.' So there are as many paths to God as there are individuals. We design our own means of communicating with the Spirit. To me yoga nurtures personal responsibility and personal authority as well as recognising we can communicate with the Spirit any time without the intermediary, the guru, the priest. All it takes is sitting quietly and creating the space and time to ask for guidance to speak with Nature, and stepping outside of the rational mind.

When people need other options to truly heal then sometimes they may choose the very strong routes of plant medicines. This is not recreational. Though yoga is called 'The Technology of Ecstasy' and Shamanism can be defined as the 'The Ecstatic Ways of Knowing' this does not mean you enter ecstatic states without great effort. It takes work and effort to awaken, to heal and to communicate with your soul and the Great Soul. Often it also takes

understanding the nature of death. This is a barrier for all who wish to enter these ceremonies. Everything rises to the surface in all Shamanic explorations, including yoga. All imbalances, all our demons and the skeletons we have in our closest come screaming to the surface. Just as they may very well do at death. This requires incredible concentration and effort to come to terms with. All these paths walk the razor edge. Then after the work of facing our unfinished business we may be lucky enough to enter into ecstatic states of awareness.

The Shamans of the Amazon say that Ayahuasca was created for everybody but not everybody was created for Ayahuasca. If people are taking MAOI pharmaceutical medicines like anti-depressants, asthma or diet medication they can have a stroke or die during a ceremony. People with mental illness or a close family member with mental illness are at risk also.

So it takes a particular person and a particular condition to want to choose this path. Then it must only be accessed through recommended guides, just as yoga should only be studied with experienced, gentle teachers who nurture independence and freedom and not cliques or cults. These techniques and ancestral suggestions are helping to lead us to mastery without following any masters. Even the Buddha said 'you are your only master.' After all, yoga is simply a very informed suggestion and gift for the human race from an ancient source. The original Yogi Shamans understood the sacred nature of existence and

the temporary gift of the human body. Many of the songs of the Vedas are similar to the chants of the Amazonian Shaman.

The Shipibo Indians of Peru have a particularly concentrated knowledge that is based on plant diets. The Jungle Doctor or Shaman will prescribe for patients for anywhere from a few days to 120 days or longer in isolation before they participate in an ayahuasca ceremony for example. There is a beautiful contemporary movie from 2016 called 'The Last Shaman' by the Italian director Raz Degan that follows an American university student from Vermont to Peru. The student was severely depressed and suicidal. He researched healing for depression around the world and discovered the Shamans of Peru. He decides he will give himself 11 months to heal through the recommendations of the Shamans or he will kill himself. The movie follows his real journey as he does a 120 day isolation diet guided by a Shipibo Indian Shaman before he will let him participate in an ayahuasca ceremony.

The real Native traditions of healing have a very powerful lineage of knowledge of the plants of the forests. Just like the origins of the creators of yoga are called the Jungle Doctors so are the Shamans of the Amazon. These traditions are connected by an invisible strand all around the world. The original yogis knew the plant medicines as well and certainly originally participated in Shamanic ceremonies and practiced the 8 Limbs of Yoga. A drumming circle, painting, playing music or a silent

meditation may work just as well for someone else. Not one path is for everybody.

You have talked before about being a 'spiritual warrior', can you expand on this? Have you met many genuine Shamans on your travels?

I like these two definitions by the Native Americans for 'Spiritual Warrior'...'A Spiritual Warrior is someone who uses their life force to create a world of balance and harmony for coming generations...on a continuous basis.' And...'A Spiritual Warrior is someone who puts energy into something that helps heal the earth and restores the balance consistently.' These definitions are straight forward and clear. Do whatever you can to make the world a better place for our children and their children... We are responsible for the future. That may mean teaching meditation and yoga to children, or working in an organic garden, or in an old age home or a hospital, or bringing yoga and meditation to friends and family... Anything that creates a positive, healthful force.

I have had the great fortune of meeting a handful of Shamans who I really felt were carrying some ancient knowledge and force. But what they created mostly was a safe space so one could have their own experience whether in a Temescal (sweat lodge), drumming/chanting circles or plant medicine ceremony. Most knew the ancient songs, chants and contemporary songs that call in ancestral energies for protection and guidance. They had great humility, gentleness and humor. They all are also either great musicians or very interested in music as well.

What is the biggest lesson you have learnt in life?

Perhaps the biggest lessons I have learnt is that the Spirit is love and compassion and the now is the most important moment...So there is nothing to fear, nothing to worry about and only love waiting on the other side of death and impermanence. Yoga, as well as all spiritual traditions...whether it is American Indian or a Mongolian, Mayan, Hawaiian or Aboriginal Shaman or teachers of Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam etc...all know at the heart of their teachings that there is only unconditional love, joy and compassion to guide us on our path...And when we tap into that energy we can instantly reach divine peace and tranquility no matter what our circumstances. All our work, especially with the coming generations as time goes by, will be honoring, preserving, protecting and restoring nature.

