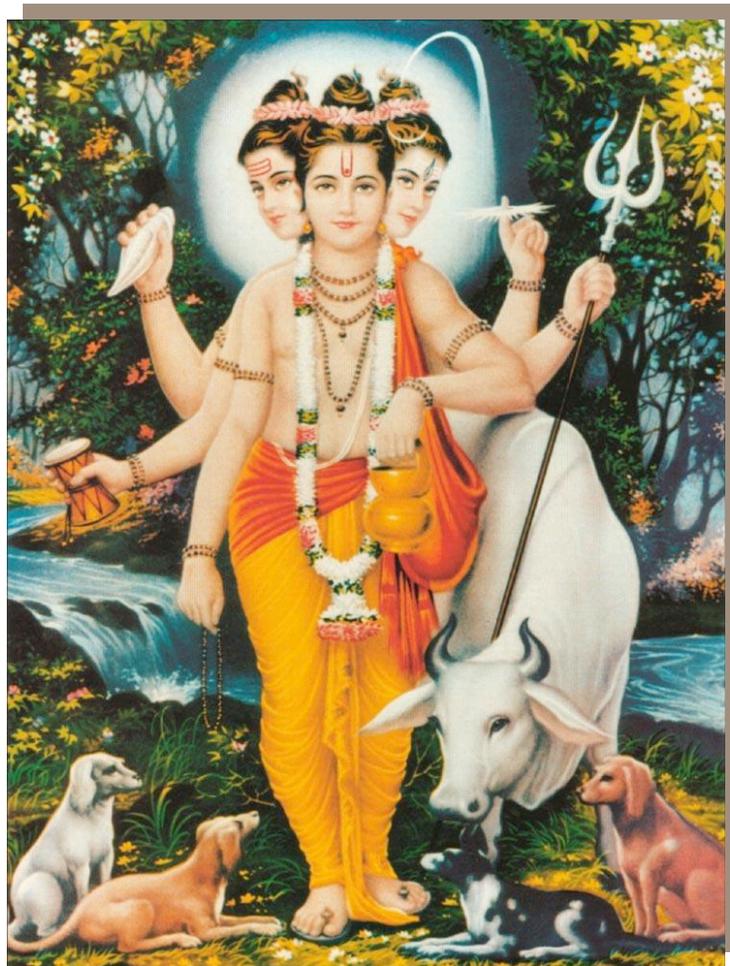


BHAKTI & BEYOND

Volume I

A BHAKTI YOGA PERSPECTIVE ON KIRTAN



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TOPIC	PAGE
Kirtan as the central practice of Bhakti Yoga	3
A deeper look at Bhakti Kirtan	10
What does Bhakti Kirtan produce?	14
Who are all these deities and why are they relevant?	15
The Hindu Trinity	17
The Divine Mother	21
Saints	22
Datta Teachers and the Dattatreya Approach to Kirtan	25
Bhakti Kirtan in the West	27
Glossary of Terms	28
References	29
Michael H. Cohen Chant Lyrics	30

KIRTAN AS THE CENTRAL PRACTICE OF BHAKTI YOGA

There are multiple ways to look at the practice of Kirtan. One interpretation sees Kirtan as the central practice of Bhakti Yoga, a practice in which we generate Bhakti (devotion) by chanting the many names of the Divine using mantras from the ancient language of Sanskrit.

Fair enough. But what do the terms Bhakti, yoga and Kirtan mean? What's a mantra? What is Sanskrit?

For the sake of deepening our understanding of the Bhakti perspective on Kirtan, we will unpack and examine each of these terms individually and the interpretation as a whole. We will then take a deeper look at (i) the practice and the experience of Bhakti Kirtan, (ii) the many names of the Divine as represented by the Hindu deities, (iii) the Bhakti Movement, (iv) Indian Saints and (v) the practice of Bhakti Kirtan in the West.

This text relies on large doses of personal experience and reports from many Western Kirtan touring and recording artists and Bhakti Yoga authors. References are cited in text and listed at the end of the document.

Let's begin!

Bhakti is a term from the ancient language of Sanskrit that loosely translates as loving devotion to God. According to the wonderful Bhakti Kirtan artist Jai Uttal, "Bhakti is usually defined as devotion. In the West we often view devotion as submission or subservience... in India Bhakti is more accurately defined as 'relationship'... one's relationship with the Divine, with one's Soul, with the Infinite Universe" (Uttal, Invocation). So, the term Bhakti points to the experience of a loving, devotional relationship with the Divine.

In Sanskrit, the term **Yoga** literally means 'to yoke.' Other interpretations of this word include 'integrate,' 'connect' and 'unite.' Rather than seeing yoga as merely asana (postures), a broader way to understand Yoga is that it is a process of integrating polarities that seem separate or opposite (i.e., up/down, personality/Divine, material/spiritual, masculine/feminine, our heart with the Heart of the Divine) but are in fact mutually arising complementary opposites. From this perspective, yoga is a practice for building understanding, awareness, competence and capacity for being with both sides of opposites as they arise, integrating all of reality rather than excluding the side of reality our minds choose to dislike. In this sense, yoga is a practice for skillfully being with life (what is) as it arises in its fullness. And, there are many ways (paths) to practice yoga, including Bhakti (devotion), Gyani (knowledge), Karma (action), Hatha (asana/postures) and others.

In Kirtan, we chant Sanskrit phrases of praise to the Divine called mantras. **Mantra** is a Sanskrit term with multiple meanings. Author Stephen Rosen translates mantra as 'mind

release' (Rosen, p. 422). Kirtan artist Vaiysaki Das says, "Man means 'the mind,' and tra means 'to deliver,' so because it is a pure spiritual sound vibration, the mantra delivers the mind from material consciousness to spiritual consciousness" (Rosen, p. 455).

According to Kirtan artist Sri Pralahad, "Mantra is a Sanskrit word consisting of two syllables: Man ('mind') and tra ('to free'). And so mantra meditation frees the mind of negative emotions, such as fear, anxiety, hatred, envy and greed, and awakens awareness of our spiritual nature – allowing spiritual love with in the heart to truly blossom. It reconnects the chanter with the supreme soul, God, and in this sense, it's the perfection of yoga – since yoga is ultimately about 're-lining' with the Supreme." (Rosen, p. 366)

Kirtan recording artist Bhagavan Das (of Be Here Now fame) states, "Man means 'the mind,' tra means 'to protect.' A mantra is a force that protects the mind... The mantra is the power that dissolves the mind so that one can then find the truth of the heart which is pure devotion" (Jacobus and Johnsen, p. 49). Kirtan artist Dave Stringer defines mantra as "mind-protection, in the sense of protecting the mind against the injuries of desire and projection and attachment." (Stringer, p. 1)

From the Dattatreya lineage of Swami Kaleshwar, a mantra is "a highly charged word or words, which have a spiritual force behind them" (Laytonville lecture, September 2008). Or, a "sacred word, verse or formula" (Kaleshwar, p. 260).

Mind-release. Mind-protection. Mind-dissolver. Mind-deliverer. Mind-freedom. Clearly a mantra is a skillful way to manage and move beyond mental chatter.

Through mantra repetition participants often reach a state where the mind slows down or even drops away. This delivers the mind from material to spiritual consciousness, allowing blissful states to arise. Profound experiences are achieved through a method (chanting mantras) that is simple, joyful and fun. As Kirtan artist Dave Stringer states, "Mantras are intended as a tool with which the spirit can release itself from the prison that the mind has created... perhaps the true meaning of the mantras can be found in the sense of unity, well-being and timelessness they elicit" (Stringer, p. 1). Rather than serving as content of the mind, Mantras help our minds settle, a prerequisite for authentic spiritual experience.

Sanskrit is an ancient language from which Hindu mantras are derived. There are many benefits to chanting in Sanskrit. One is that the words are not burdened with loaded meanings (i.e., God, Jesus, righteous), shallow interpretations or unhelpful mental concepts. According to Jacobus and Johnsen, "There is undeniably something special about chanting in an incredibly ancient, holy tongue. This frees your mind from having to consider the meaning of the words, and allows you to simply immerse yourself in the living experience of sacred sound" (p. 9).

The roots of Sanskrit run deep. According to Dave Stringer, “From a linguistic perspective, Sanskrit is the mother tongue of many modern languages, and a kind of periodic table of elemental sound meaning” (Stringer, p. 1).

So, what is **Bhakti Yoga**? According to author Linda Johnsen, “Bhakti Yoga is the path of the heart. Hindu sages claim it’s the quickest way to the Lord of Light whose infinite love embraces all the beings in all the galaxies in all dimensions of time and space” (Johnsen, p. 271).

Jai Uttal eloquently shares that “all the emotions that come into play in that relationship (a love relationship with the Divine) are perfectly valid emotions to be utilized in Bhakti Yoga... In Bhakti yoga one embraces the full spectrum of emotion. These are called forward through practices in which one embraces the Divine... The Yogi’s said one can dance for God, make food for God, make love with God, write poetry to God, paint pictures for God... But most of all, and maybe best of all, you can sing to God. And this is Kirtan” (Uttal, audio transcription).

So this brings us to **Kirtan**, which can be viewed as the central practice of Bhakti Yoga. Dave Stringer translates the Sanskrit word Kirtan as “to sing.” (Dave Stringer, p. 1). It can also be interpreted as ‘to repeat’ (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kirtan>). Bhagavan Das translates Kirtan as ‘to cut.’ In his words, “To do Kirtan is to cut through discursive thought and subconscious gossip. It means to cut through conflicting emotions and conceptualizing” (Jacobus and Johnsen, p. 49). According to Rosen, “Kirtana is a Sanskrit word that means ‘praise’ or ‘glory’... Simply understood, it is a form of song that centers on glorifying God, commonly performed in a ‘call and response’ style of singing... an uncomplicated and effective way of communing with God” (p. 4, 6). According to authors Maggie Jacobus and Linda Johnsen, Kirtan is “singing, chanting, and praising the Divine” (p. 7).

Linda Johnsen writes, “Kirtan means singing about God or the Goddess... For Hindus the name of God is God. To name him or her is to invoke the Divine’s living presence. It’s said that in the beginning you chant the name. Then the name chants you... Hindu saints frequently recommend Bhakta yoga as the easiest and most enjoyable path into the Divine presence” (Johnsen, p. 277-79).

We can see that Kirtan is the practice of repetitive chanting/singing in call and response fashion of “ecstatic love poems to the divine” set to a form of folk music (Dave Stringer, p. 1). Praising the Divine cuts through the activity of the mind, opening us to a deeper level of experience, communion (yoga) with the Divine.

The practice of Bhakti Kirtan generates Bhatki (devotion). Makes sense, yes?

So, how did Kirtan become a widely accepted practice? There have been two waves to the **Bhakti Movement**. The first wave took place in 15th century India. A second recently

washed ashore in the West.

According to Rosen, in ancient India spiritual activity was “originally exclusive to the kings and other higher classes” (Rosen, p. 97-8) However, an emergent Bhakti movement in the 15th century “challenged that mindset, believing that all are equal and each individual could speak to the Divine” (p. 97-8). As a result, “Common people were taught simple songs, the aim of which was to achieve a state of ecstatic union within oneself and within the company of fellow seekers” (p. 97-8). Sharing this practice broadly across Indian society had far reaching impact. According to Rosen, “In part because it upended the caste system, this movement caught fire. Some of the world’s first ‘rock stars’ developed, ecstatic singers who could move a crowd. It turned into a genuine mass movement” (p. 97-8).

The moving force behind this revolution was Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu whose mission was to make accessible “the mystical path of yogic devotion, which had for so long remained hidden in esoteric texts and in the minds and hearts of spiritual adepts” (Rosen, p. 461). According to Rosen, Chaitanya “revolutionized the subcontinent with his method of ecstatic chant, using spiritual vocalization as yoga and developing it into a sophisticated science of ecstasy” (p. 3).

The second wave of Kirtan is currently unfolding in the West. The first Kirtan recordings by Western artists took place in the 1960’s and early 1970’s through the efforts of George Harrison, Bhagavan Das, Vaiyasaki Das and others. By the mid-1990’s pioneering artists such as Krishna Das, Jai Uttal and others were releasing albums with widening appeal. The Western Kirtan scene is discussed below in further detail.

But why is this practice taking root at this historical moment in the West? Rosen explains, “The scriptures state that for each world age, a specific method of God realization is particularly appropriate: In Satya–yuga, millions of years ago, one attained the Absolute through deep meditation; in Treta-yuga, through opulent sacrifices; in Dvapara-yuga, through Deity (iconic) workshop; and in Kali, the current age, through chanting the holy name of the Lord” (p. 7).

This sentiment is echoed by Bhagavan Das who shared the words of his guru, the revered Indian saint Neem Karoli Baba who said “In the Kali Yuga (the current era of spiritual darkness), take the name of God continually and you’ll attain everything” (Jacobus and Johnsen, p. 43). Bhagavan Das shared the words of renowned Indian Saint Ramakrishna who said, “In the Kali Yuga, if you cry to the Mother with all your heart, she will come” (Jacobus and Johnsen, p. 48). From a Bhakti perspective, Kirtan is seen as the easiest path to liberation in the Kali Yuga.

But why now? Why is Bhakti Kirtan taking root in the West at this historical moment? What does it offer that is needed, yet not present in our Western culture?

There are several unique aspects of Kirtan that many Westerners find appealing. Kirtan is (i) experiential (not conceptual), (ii) community building (not isolated/isolating), (iii) democratic and participatory (we are in the action, not on the sidelines merely observing other's experiences), (iv) music for those with mature tastes, (v) a powerful practice for claiming one's voice and (vi) a fun and easy way to experience the power and beauty of connecting with the Divine. Let's look at each of these claims.

The practice of Kirtan is experiential, not conceptual. Bhagavan Das points to a major breakdown in Western culture, our over-emphasis on mental constructs, analysis, models and theories. While this approach works well in many areas of our modern world, it falls short in the domain of spirituality, which is grounded in personal experience, not belief or conceptual understanding. Bhagavan Das says, "The mind mesh captures you. We get lost in concepts, and we imagine that because we read something or we thought about it, it was an actual experience. But it's not the real thing" (Jacobus and Johnsen, p. 47-8). In other words, there is a difference between describing a glass of water and drinking a glass of water. Only the latter will satisfy your thirst. Kirtan artist Krishna Das agrees, "I feel that Westerners don't need any more concepts – we have enough concepts. I feel what we really need is experience, and we need true experience" (Rosen, p. 32-33)

So how does Bhakti Kirtan address this breakdown? "We don't need to be creating some kind of fantasy life for our emotions to hide in, which is what I think most people do," Krishna Das states. "Kirtan breaks you out of that... Because God is already present. He's there in His name and He's there all around us. So any fantasy concocted in our minds, and constructed from our mental fluctuations, is simply more illusion. And if we can directly experience the ground of our being, the depth of our being – and this is what happens through the chanting of the name – we can rise beyond all that" (Rosen, p. 32-33).

Bhagavan Das agrees, "Nada Yoga (the yoga of sound) is using music to return to who you really are, to your essence. It focuses devotion through sound to transport us out of our intellects into our hearts" (Jacobus and Johnsen, p. 47-8).

In other words, Kirtan helps us connect deeply with ourselves, our own experience, in a way that is non-conceptual (mental). We drop out of our mind and into a deeper experience of our self, as well as with others, our life and the Divine.

Kirtan is communal. It helps us connect deeply with others by coming together and creating a powerful, Divinely musical experience together. As Kirtan artist Wah! shares, "Kirtan is open to everybody. You've got healers, you've got drug addicts, you've got people who are doing yoga so they sit on the floor, and people who need to sit on chairs. There are people of all religions. Kirtan isn't a group you have to join. It's just an experience that you can share. It is open to everybody" (Jacobus and Johnsen, p. 117). There are many benefits to doing this practice in a group. Wah! declares, "Doing it in a

group is contagious. They say the energy doesn't just multiply, it grows exponentially (Jacobus and Johnsen, p. 113).

And this communal experience is primal! In Kirtan you don't show up as an audience member who listens to a group of professional musicians. You show up as a participant, a member of a tribe, who is guided into and helps create a powerful musical/spiritual experience. As Dave Stringer concisely states, "In Kirtan you're not just listening to the music, you *are* the music" (Jacobus and Johnsen, p. 93). We drop into the primal human experience of singing, dancing and clapping... creating music together with a tribe of fellow humans. This is a primary and essential human experience!

From the perspective of healing and stepping into one's voiced and power, Kirtan is a safe and supportive place for claiming one's voice. Jacobus and Johnsen point out "Many people have been told they don't have a good voice. Kirtan is the ideal place to reclaim your voice, to allow your soul its full expression" (p. 10). Jewish Kirtan artist Yofiyah (Susan Deikman) founded the Tone Deaf Choir to "help self-defined non-singers overcome their perceived limitations" (Rosen, p. 293). She observes internal shifts around voice and music happening for individuals after building confidence through successful musical experiences (p. 293).

Finally, Kirtan has appeal to Western audiences with a maturity that draws them beyond music as entertainment and into an appreciation of music as a form and forum for spirituality. According to Bhakti Kirtan artist Miten, "In Western culture we've mainly reduced music to entertainment – we sing our pain and our hurt and our lust, which is all real enough. But we rarely venture beyond that. We rarely seek the higher realities that can open up to us through sound. Western music is mainly concerned with interpersonal relationships in the world around us. And that's legitimate. But what about spiritual relationship? What about our relationship with God?" (Rosen, p. 249-50). Jacobus and Johnsen describe Kirtan as "very different from most popular music. It's not concerned with romantic desire or failed relationships or teenage angst. It's about our relationship with spirit, and how to deepen that connection... the universal language of spirit, the song of the soul" (p. 8).

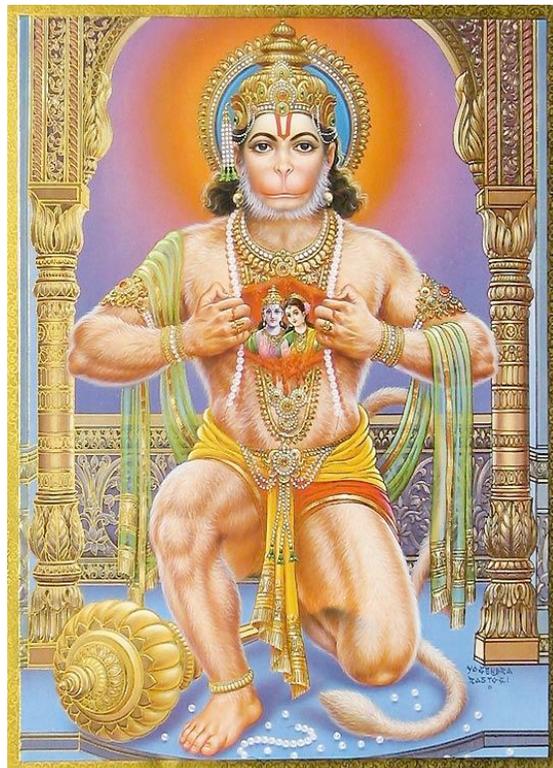
Above we claimed that Kirtan can be seen as the central practice of Bhakti Yoga in which practitioners chant the many names of the Divine using mantras from the ancient language of Sanskrit. We can now see that, from this point of view, Kirtan involves chanting mind-dissolving mantras that repeat the many names of the Divine in the ancient language of Sanskrit for the sake of expressing and experiencing loving devotion (Bhakti) to God. Through this yoga we are released from our mental chatter and unite our heart with the Heart of the Divine, experiencing moods of joy, love and devotion.

The appeal of Bhakti Kirtan at this historical moment can be related to the way the practice is: (i) experiential, (ii) community building, (iii) participatory, (iv) music for those with mature tastes, (v) a skillful way to claim one's voice and (vi) a fun and easy way to

experience the power and beauty of connecting with the Divine.

IN SUMMARY

- Kirtan – ‘to sing,’ the practice of repetitive chanting/singing Sanskrit mantras in call and response fashion to the Divine.
- Bhakti – loving devotion to God.
- Yoga – to ‘yoke,’ integrate, unite and connect apparent polarities.
- Bhakti Yoga – the path of the Heart.
- Sanskrit - an ancient language from which Hindu mantras are derived.
- Mantra – mind-release, mind-protection, mind-dissolution. A skillful way to manage and move beyond mental chatter.
- Bhakti Movement – first wave launched by Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in the 15th century. Second wave occurred in West at end of 20th century.
- Kali Yuga – the current era/age, an age of spiritual darkness.



Now that we have a basic understanding of Bhakti Kirtan and several related concepts, let's take a deeper dive.

Below we explore the (i) practice and experience of Bhakti Kirtan, (ii) Hindu deities, (iii) Indian Saints and (iv) practice of Bhakti Kirtan in the West.

A DEEPER LOOK AT BHAKTI KIRTAN

Let's take a deeper look at the practice of Kirtan and what it produces in practitioners.

WHAT IS BHAKTI KIRTAN?

Leading Western Kirtan artists and Bhakti Yoga authors describe Bhakti Kirtan as:

- Worship and meditation
- A practice that easily and naturally takes us to higher spiritual states
- A way to achieve intimacy with God
- Scientific
- An expression of the primary human impulse to vocalize ritually
- A practice that is easy to master
- A very personal practice that is simultaneously a dynamic group experience
- A way to achieve deep and authentic silence
- A way to move out of our minds

Below we examine each of these claims.

Bhakti Kirtan is worship and meditation

According to Jai Uttal, "Kirtan is such an amazing form of worship because it can carry and express and hold and nurture everything inside of us. By going through the repetition, of course, the mind just kind of chills out. We go into meditation without even really knowing we've gone into meditation, not even caring that we're going into meditation. Because the mind takes a backseat to the heart" (Rosen, p. 422).

According to Kirtan artist Joni Allen, Kirtan is "a singing meditation." She shares, "in Kirtan I'm listening. To my ears, my heart, the music that's going on. So, my mind stops thinking about my day, my dreams, what's missing, what I have. Instead it gets caught up in the energy that the music is creating. I feel completely connected to everyone in the room, and to God. And we're all one."

Bhakti Kirtan is worship that stills our minds, drops us into meditation and lands us in our hearts.

Bhakti Kirtan easily and naturally takes us to higher spiritual states

According to author Stephen Rosen, Bhakti Kirtan gently and easily takes us to the higher states of spirituality. In his words, “Kirtan does not ask us to achieve the highest level. Instead, it dutifully takes us there, sometimes in spite of ourselves... It gradually takes us beyond the physical, mental, and intellectual strata of existence and situates us in transcendence.” (p. 6)

The chanting does the work for us. All we have to do is show up and participate.

Bhakti Kirtan provides intimacy with God

Stephen Rosen shares, “According to most of India’s renowned sages, if yoga is about linking with God, Kirtan is the best way to facilitate that link. Here’s why. When you sing to someone, you develop intimacy with that person. In fact, such singing presupposes intimacy – you generally sing to those who are near and dear. And the singing brings you closer, too. In this way, Kirtan sparks something buried deep within the heart, rekindling memories of an all but lost relationship with the Divine. And it accelerates that relationship, putting you in proximity to God, which, of course, is what yoga is all about... Thus, Kirtan is the essence of yoga, for by chanting the names of the Divine, one can develop intimacy with Him, which is the ultimate goal of yoga” (p. v).

Kirtan is a form of yoga (connecting) with the Divine. It creates closeness, relationship and intimacy with the Divine.

Bhakti Kirtan is scientific

Dave Stringer shares, “The Western scientific methodology says, ‘Gather your facts, gather your experiences, and draw your conclusions from that. Can someone else come to the same conclusions through the same experiment?’... So what I’m saying with Kirtan is, ‘Okay, don’t believe in it. Let’s drop that part of it. How about if you just sing these mantras? Tell me how you feel right now. Now sing these mantras. How do they make you feel? Did it shift the way you felt? What happened to you during the process of chanting?’ In this way they can see the science of chanting in action” (Rosen, p. 148). He points out how “A good Kirtan is indisputable. Everyone involved can feel it. Now that’s science, to go back to what we were discussing a moment ago. Experiment and observation. You engage in Kirtan, with full heart, and it gets a particular result. If you can repeat that experience with some certainty, then that’s what science is all about. That’s the science of Kirtan” (Rosen, p. 149).

Bhakti Kirtan is scientific. We engage in the practice and look to our phenomenology (inner experience) to discover what is produced. In this manner we gather evidence and can come to conclusions about its impact.

HOW DOES CHANTING WORK?

Author and Kirtan artist Robert Gass identifies five key elements that make chanting a powerful and appealing practice:

1. Association (or triggering). One's experiential memories, built up over time, invest a piece of music with ever-deeper levels of meaning. Think about the first time (and subsequent times) you heard the Beatles song Hey Jude. What memories are associated with this piece of music?
2. Entrainment. Our bodies naturally become aligned with the sounds, melodies and rhythms they encounter. As Gass writes, "If you're in a room and there's a heavy drum beat your body will almost involuntarily start to move."
3. Breath. In Kirtan the chanter's breath pattern slows from the normal 12 to 15 breaths per minute to between 5 and 8 breaths per minute, "considered optimal for mind-body health."
4. Sonic effects. Extended vowel sounds frequently found in sacred chanting (i.e., Aum is chanted as Ah-o-oooh-mmm) produce positive sensations and healing effects.
5. Intention. We show up in Kirtan understanding that we are engaging in a sacred practice. We hold an intention to "to be close to God."

Gass feels that the synergy of these five elements working together creates the power inherent in sacred chanting. "It's sort of like a secret weapon," he says. "You're not thinking about it; it just happens" http://www.yogajournal.com/newtoyoga/833_4.cfm).

Bhakti Kirtan is an expression of a primary human impulse

In Chanting: Discovering Spirit in Sound (Broadway Books, 1999), Gass assesses ritual vocalizing as a primary and universal human impulse. He writes, "if you look into creation myths from different cultures, in almost every case the world is said to come into being through sound, through chant. It's in Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, and Native American religions."

Bhakti Kirtan, as a form of participatory music, is fundamental to the experience of being human.

Anyone can easily be an accomplished yogi in the practice of Bhakti Kirtan

Rosen writes, "Anyone can chant, and the nature of chant is such that it immediately engages the sense, the mind, the heart. Its participatory method pulls you right in, and

before you know it, you're absorbed, concentrating on the divine name like an accomplished yogi. And that's the point: By allowing the chant to enter your ears and your heart, you are, in a sense, a yogi, without making a conscious endeavor. And while that might only be the beginning, you have, indeed, taken part in the yoga of Kirtan" (p. vi).

Unlike many practices that take years to move from beginner to competent to expert (i.e. tai chi, playing the piano, swing dancing), Kirtan is so easy and natural that participants quickly become accomplished and experience the full effects of the practice.

Bhakti Kirtan synchronizes the group while being a profoundly individual practice

Jacobus and Johnsen report, "Live Kirtan is at once both a very personal practice and a dynamic group experience. Singing and breathing together, participants become synchronized. The group melts together, lifting each other up, collectively soaring on the sound current" (p. 10).

Dave Stringer shares, "The intention of Kirtan is consciousness-transformative, directing the singers to vanish into the song as drops merge into the ocean. The musicians and the crowd coalesce in a cloud of intelligence, turning together like a flock of birds, until the song vanishes itself into the blue skies of silence" (Stringer, p. 1).

It ain't over until the silence ends!

Jacobus and Johnsen write, "And then the music stops. That is often the most powerful moment of all" (p. 10).

Kirtan artist Ragani shares, "Kirtan has the outer aspect of singing, but in the space between the sounds when you stop, you'll feel something. And that something is you... It's not anything that someone is doing to you. It's that energy that is always *within* you that you're feeling" (Jacobus and Johnsen, p. 10).

Dave Stringer adds, "And then the music stops. That's science, too. It's so intoxicating to sit there with a group of people and to not move, to scarcely breathe. Time has stopped. Desire has stopped. Mind has stopped. If even for only a fleeting instant, to sit at the edge of that stillness is just such a profound thing" (Rosen, p. 149).

The practice of Kirtan produces a form of authentic silence that is both rare and powerfully transformative.

Bhakti Kirtan moves us out of our minds

Jacobus and Johnsen report, "The sacred sounds begin to act as spam blockers for the soul, replacing the often trite or petty thoughts that may clutter the field of your awareness. In this way the practice of Kirtan really does become a yogic path, reorienting you toward a more deeply spiritual life" (p. 11).

Ragani shares, “We started calling Kirtan ‘the back door to the divine’ because it’s such an easy way to go inside. Meditation isn’t easy for a lot of people (when they first begin this spiritual practice), so when they go to a Kirtan and then stop singing, they find that calmness or peace or love between the songs. They get a taste of inner life” (Jacobus and Johnsen, p. 72).

Traditional forms of sitting meditation ask us to quiet our ‘monkey’ minds. Especially for beginning and intermediate practitioners this is often very difficult. The practice of Bhakti Kirtan naturally and easily drops us out of our minds. It does the work for us, allowing us easy access to this state. The more we access this state, the easier it is to regain.

WHY BOTHER? WHAT DOES BHAKTI KIRTAN PRODUCE?

Why bother engaging in the practice of Kirtan? What does it offer to us? Western Chant artists and Bhakti Yoga authors share that Bhakti Kirtan produces the following:

WHAT DOES BHAKTI KIRTAN PRODUCE?

- Pure love for God
- God’s grace
- An open heart
- Connection

Let’s explore each of these claims.

Pure love for God

Sri Prahalad poetically reports, “The real benediction that the holy name can bestow – that is, pure love for God, prema. This is the real fruit of chanting” (Rosen, p. 367).

The fruit of our practice is pure love for the Divine.

God’s grace

Jai Uttal says, “Kirtan is like a magnet, inviting and begging grace to enter our hearts and our lives. Kirtan is a most precious thing, something to be cherished and practiced with total gratitude, and those who learn how to enter into it will feel God’s grace and presence as the closest of the close, the dearest of the dear – our true beloved” (Rosen, p. 424).

Karnamrita Dasi sees Kirtan as a “calling out to God that resonates with a soft heart, and it has a universality about it that you don’t find anywhere else. If you chant the names of God with a loving and open heart, all of the secrets of the name come out to you. Like a shower or a waterfall, it pours its grace into you” (p. 217).

According to Bhagavan Das, “We use the energy of our voice to transcend the energy of our mind. And God comes and listens to us sing. How do you come to be in the presence of God? By remembering God. Divine thoughts bring you to divinity” (Jacobus and Johnsen, p. 50).

Bhakti Kirtan invites Divine Grace to enter our lives and our hearts. It is a calling to the Divine, an invitation to join with Divine presence.

An open heart

Krishna Das shares, “Chanting breaks down the difference between the inside and the outside. It’s about having a heart that never shuts down, that nothing can shut down” (Jacobus and Johnsen, p. 22).

Bhakti Kirtan helps us find and live from our heart, in our practice and in our lives... even amidst the chaos of everyday living.

Connection

Karnamrita Dasi shares, “Kirtan was and still is on many levels the most beautiful thing to me. It’s a magical feeling of being connected – to the universe, to the self” (Rosen, p. 191).

Kirtan generates connection with oneself, with others and with the Divine.

WHO ARE ALL THESE DEITIES AND WHY ARE THEY RELEVANT?

In Bhakti Kirtan we chant the sacred names of the Divine, both masculine and feminine. Let’s take a look at these deities and how they can be useful to our practice.

What’s in a name?

Why are we chanting the names of deities? Why not other words?

Stephen Rosen cites the Padma Purana, which states, “Because the holy name and the ‘holy named’ are nondifferent, the name is fully complete, pure, and eternally liberated... Philosophically, this idea can be summarized as follows: matter and spirit are opposites. Thus, since in the material world, all things are relative, and part of that relativity manifests in a thing and its name being different, in the spiritual realm, the opposite must be true: a thing and its name are one. This is the nature of the Absolute... The implications here are tremendous. If God and His name are the same, by chanting one can get close to Him in every sense of the word.” (p. 6)

In the relative world the name (chair) and the named (chair) are two separate things. You can't sit on the word chair, but you can sit in a chair. In the spiritual world the name and the named are non-different, are one. Thus, from this perspective, speaking the name of the Divine is to be in contact with the Divine.

Understanding the deities

As an orientation, let's start by making sense of the various Hindu deities. Hinduism has been called 'Polymorphous monotheism.' What does this mean? Simply put one god in many forms. Let's unpack this notion.

All is Brahman. This is similar to saying, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, that all is God. Since Brahman/God is unfathomable to the human mind, Hinduism looks at the many aspects of the Divine in many different forms (i.e., Shiva, Kali, Durga).

Brahman



Brahman is the “unchanging, infinite, immanent and transcendent reality, which is the Divine Ground of all matter, energy, time, space, being, and everything beyond in this Universe.” The word "Brahman" is derived from the verb brh (Sanskrit: to grow), and connotes greatness (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brahman>).

Brahman may be similar to the Judeo-Christian concept of God - formless, all pervasive, beyond this world. The Divine Ground of all that is.

Dattatreya

Three-headed Dattatreya is simultaneously Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva and their consorts (Saraswati, Laxmi and Sati/Parvati) (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dattatreya>). Datta symbolizes the dynamism of the trinity – the energies of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, past/present/future, states of consciousness (waking/sleeping and deep dreamless sleep), beginning/middle/end, thesis/antithesis/synthesis. Dattatreya pictured with 4 dogs (symbolizing the Vedas, ancient scriptures) and a sacred cow. Dattatreya appears in androgynous form (both masculine and feminine) and is depicted holding implements (musical instruments and weapons) of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Dattatreya is viewed as the “primordial guru from which all lineages ultimately arise” (Kaleshwar, p. 258).



THE HINDU TRINITY

The Hindu trinity is composed of Brahma and his consort Saraswati, Vishnu and his consort Laxmi, and Shiva and his consort Sati. Below we briefly examine each of these Divine couples.

Brahma and Saraswati (Creation)

Brahma “symbolizes the aspect of the Supreme Reality that brings forth creation... His divine consort is Saraswati, the Goddess of learning and knowledge. She provides Brahma with knowledge that is necessary for the process of creation” (Uttal handbook, p. 27). Brahma is the creative force of the universe (Kaleshwar, p. 258).

Vishnu and Laxmi (Sustenance)

Vishnu “represents the aspect of the Supreme Reality that preserves and sustains the universe... Also known by other names, such as Vasudeva and Narayana... Incarnates as Rama, Krishna and Buddha” (Uttal handbook, p. 28). Vishnu is the sustaining force of the universe (Kaleshwar, p. 263).

Shiva and Sati/Parvati (Dissolution)

Shiva “dissolves the universe for creation of the next cycle so that the unliberated souls will have another opportunity to liberate themselves from bondage with the physical world. Lord Shiva protects the souls from pain and suffering. He is the Lord of mercy and compassion. He protects devotees from evil forces such as lust, greed and anger. He grants boons, bestows grace and awakens wisdom in His devotees” (Uttal handbook, p. 30). Shiva is the destroying force of the universe (Kaleshwar, p. 262).

Brahma	Vishnu	Shiva
Creator	Protector/Sustainer	Destroyer
Beginning	Middle	End
Creation	Sustenance	Destruction
Generator	Operator	Destroyer

Let’s take a deeper look at these Divine couples.

Brahma and Saraswati

Brahma is the god of creation. Saraswati, his consort, is the goddess of learning. Brahma creates the world (through the sound of Om), then withdraws. As a result, out of the millions of temples in India, only four major temples are to Brahma. Brahma is typically pictured bearded with four heads and four hands (the four directions, four Vedas) that hold a lotus (from which he was born), a pot (represents earth, which he created), a book (the light of knowledge he spreads) and a rosary (represents the rigorous penance/austerities he engaged in to gain the powers of creation)

[\(http://www.exoticindiaart.com/product/ZK57/\)](http://www.exoticindiaart.com/product/ZK57/).



Saraswati is the “Hindu goddess of knowledge, music and the arts... with the goddesses Laxmi and Parvati or Durga, she forms the Tridevi (“three goddesses”), who are consorts to the male trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva”

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saraswati>). The name Saraswati literally means “the one who flows” (as in thoughts, words or a river) (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saraswati>). In fact, she was originally a river goddess, and the Saraswati River played a key role in the historical development of India. Later she became

more closely associated with literature, arts and music.

Saraswati is associated with “purity and creativity, especially in the context of communication, such as in literary and verbal skills.” Her four arms represent the “four aspects of human personality in learning: mind, intellect, alertness, and ego” as well as the four Vedas (root Hindu scriptures) that represent the three forms of literature (poetry, prose and music). Her hands hold a book (knowledge), mala (meditation/spirituality), pot of sacred water (creativity and purification) and the vina, a stringed instrument that represents “love for and rhythm of music which represents all emotions and feelings expressed in speech or music”. A white swan is often located next to Saraswati’s feet symbolizing discrimination between the good and the bad, eternal and the transitory, spiritual and material (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saraswati>).

Vishnu and Laxmi, and their Avatars



Vishnu is seen as the “All-Pervading essence of all beings, the master of, and beyond, the past, present and future, the creator and destroyer of all existences, one who supports, sustains and governs the Universe and originates and develops all elements within.” In Sanskrit, Vishnu means the All-Pervading One (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vishnu>).

Vishnu’s physical existence is indicated by his two front arms, while his two back arms indicate his presence in the spiritual world. His blue skin tone represents his “all-pervasive nature, blue being the color of the infinite sky as well as the Infinite Ocean on which he resides.” Vishnu wears a crown, two earrings (representing the inherent dualities in creation), a garland of flowers and a jewel on his chest in which Laxmi resides. He rests on Ananta, the immortal and infinite snake. Vishnu holds (i) a conch shell (power of creating and maintaining the universe through the five elements and Divine Sound of Om), (ii) the chakra which symbolizes the purified spiritualized mind, (iii) a mace which symbolizes that his divine power is the source all spiritual, mental and physical strength and (iv) a lotus flower representing spiritual liberation, Divine perfection, purity and the unfolding of Spiritual consciousness within the individual. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vishnu>)



Laxmi (or Shri) is the Hindu goddess of spiritual and material wealth and prosperity. She is the goddess of the means to achieving objectives, including prosperity in our lives. She sits on a lotus (purity and spiritual power) adorned in beautiful clothing and precious jewels, wearing a calm and loving expression (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laxmi>).

At appropriate historical moments (some say the changing of the yuga's, or era's), Vishnu and Laxmi incarnate in human form to set the world back into balance and introduce the 'rules' of the new yuga, or world age (Kaleshwar, p. 263).

Below is a list of ten incarnations of Vishnu.

TEN INCARNATIONS OF VISHNU

These incarnations "reveal the help rendered by God during various stages of human evolution" (Uttal Handbook, p. 29-30).

1. Matsya - fish
2. Kurma - tortoise
3. Varaha - boar
4. Narasimha - man-lion
5. Vamana - dwarf
6. Parasurama - warrior with axe
7. Rama
8. Krishna
9. Buddha
10. Kalki - man on white horse, expected to appear at the end of the Kali Yuga.

These incarnations, consistent with the theory of evolution, move from animal to half-human/half-animal to fully human. The most relevant incarnations to the Bhakti Kirtan world are Rama and his consort Sita and Krishna and his consort Radha.

Sita and Ram

The main characters in the Ramayana Sita is a beautiful princess, and Ram a warrior-prince. As an incarnation of Vishnu, Ram represents the all-pervading, unmanifest Source of all creation. Sita represents the infinite and Divine Beloved of the Universe. Along the way they help and are befriended by **Hanuman** the Monkey God. Hanuman is a ferocious warrior who successfully completes amazing feats of courage and strength due to his selfless devotion and service to Ram.



He is often depicted ripping open his chest to reveal Sita and Ram in place of his heart (Uttal, handbook p. 35-42, audio transcription, Prime).

Vishnu and Laxmi also incarnate as Krishna and Radha. **Krishna** means 'dark colored' or 'all attractive' or the Existence of Bliss. Other names for Krishna are Govinda, Gopala, Hari, Narayana and Shyam. **Radha** is the goddess... the embodiment of all the flavors and aroma's of love. Many of the myriad of stories about Krishna fall into three distinct phases – young Krishna, the mischievous butter thief, the beautiful flute-playing cow herding adolescent Krishna, and the older sage Krishna who advises the great warrior Arjuna.

Shiva and Sati/Parvati, plus their son Ganesh



Shiva means “Auspicious One.” He creates endings for the sake of new and greater beginnings, transforming our lives by slicing through our attachments and bestowing grace that, upon surrendering our attachments, connects us with the energy of creation. Shiva the destroyer is the primordial energy of transformation.

Shiva is generally represented as “immersed in deep meditation or dancing the Tandava upon the demon of ignorance in his manifestation of Nataraja, the lord of the dance”. He possesses a third eye with which he “burned Desire (Kāma) to ashes.” His throat is blue from drinking and holding “the poison churned up from the world ocean.” He has matted hair, through which runs the sacred Ganges River to cool the heat generated by this generous act. Covered in ash (sometimes from the cremation grounds) he sits upon a tiger skin with a garland of snakes, holding a trident and damru (drum). His mount is Nandi, the bull, and he resides on Mount Kailash in the Himalayas (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shiva>).

Sati or Dākshāyāni is the Hindu goddess of marital felicity and longevity. She is the first consort of Shiva whom she entices from “ascetic isolation into creative participation in the world” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dakshayani>). In the wake of an argument with her father over the virtues of her husband Shiva, Sati is unbearably insulted and throws herself into a fire, killing herself. An angry Shiva performed the “fearsome and awe-inspiring Tāndava dance with Sati's charred body on his shoulders. During this dance, Sati's body came apart and the pieces fell at different places on earth.” Each site was honored by the creation of a temple (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dakshayani>).

Sati reincarnates as **Parvati**, who becomes Shiva's second consort. As she is the daughter of Himavat, the king of the mountains, the name Parvati translates as 'She of the mountains'.

Ganesh is the son of Shiva and Parvati. With Shiva was deep in meditation in a cave, Parvati created Ganesh to guard the door of her house as she bathed. Shiva returned and Ganesh attempted to prevent him from entering his house to protect his mother's virtue. Shiva severed his head with his trident. An incensed Parvati demanded Shiva restore Ganesh back to life, which he did by replacing the boy's head with the head of an elephant (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parvati>). Ganesh is always invoked at the beginning of any project as he's the remover of obstacles. "He's the bestower of wisdom and divine knowledge. He's very patient. He also represents the Earth element, the root. How can we move forward before we make friends with our root, our foundation?" (Uttal, audio transcription).



THE DIVINE MOTHER

Each masculine deity has a feminine counterpart as they need Shakti (creative energy) to take action in the world. According to Jai Uttal, "the mother is the Protector and the bestower of favors. Female deities came to be envisaged as the active and productive principle while the male gods were seen as passive and otherworldly. Their transcendence made them remote and too distant to concern themselves with daily existence... The Great Goddess is eternal, has the world as her form, and she pervades it." (Uttal Handbook p. 13-16)



Durga translates as "the invincible" and she is depicted as a "warrior aspect of Parvati" that rides on the back of a tiger. Her eight arms holding eight different weapons, symbolizing the eight Siddhic (supernatural) powers (Kaleshwar, p. 259, 262; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Durga>).

Kali

is associated with death and destruction. Kali translates as "black" and is related to the "force of time (kala)". The goddess of time and change, historically presented as violent, she is more recently seen as benevolent and supremely loving (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/kali>). Jai



Uttal shares, “in the battle with evil, Kali was so much involved in the killing spree that she got carried away and began destroying everything in sight. To stop her, Lord Shiva threw himself under her feet. Shocked at this sight, Kali stuck out her tongue in astonishment, and put an end to her homicidal rampage... The reclined Shiva lying prostrate under the feet of Kali suggests that without the power of Kali (Shakti), Shiva is inert” (Uttal Handbook, p. 17-18). Kali is a form of the Divine mother who destroys negativity (Kaleshwar, p. 260).

IN SUMMARY

- Brahma – the Creator.
- Brahmin - infinite, immanent, and transcendent reality which is the Divine Ground of everything in and beyond in this Universe.
- Dattatreya – three headed deity, simultaneously Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.
- Durga – protective form of the Divine Mother.
- Ganesh – elephant headed deity, remover of obstacles.
- Kali – ferocious form of the Divine Mother.
- Krishna – incarnation of Vishnu.
- Laxmi – the Goddess of spiritual and material prosperity, consort to Vishnu.
- Parvati – second consort to Shiva. Mother of Ganesh, daughter of the mountains.
- Radha – incarnation of Laxmi, consort to Krishna.
- Ram – incarnation of Vishnu, hero of the Ramayana.
- Saraswati – the Goddess of learning, the arts, music and creativity, consort to Brahma.
- Sati – first consort to Shiva. Throws herself into a fire, leading Shiva to dance the Tandav.
- Shiva – the Destroyer.
- Sita – incarnation of Laxmi, heroine of the Ramayana.
- Vishnu – the Sustainer.

HOW ABOUT ALL THESE SAINTS?

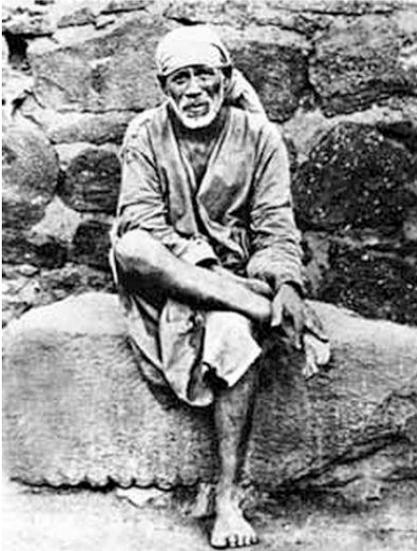
There are many saints associated with Kirtan, including Shirdi Sai Baba, Neem Karoli Baba, Swami Muktananda, Shri Anandamayi Ma, and many others. These saints are often called guru's. But, what is a **guru**?

This term has entered the English language as slang, meaning 'expert.' However, 'expert' is a shallow interpretation of the term, which actually translates from Sanskrit as “dispeller (gu) of darkness (ru)” or ‘weighty one,’ indicating a being of great knowledge or skill. Guru literally means “a preceptor who shows others knowledge

(light) and destroys ignorance (darkness)” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guru>). A guru offers energy channels that connect the natural and spiritual worlds.

Many saints are revered in spiritual traditions that utilize the Bhakti path and the practice of Kirtan. Below are very brief sketches of a small number of Indian saints.

Shirdi Sai Baba



“Sai Baba of Shirdi was a crown jewel among Saints.” (Uttal Handbook, p. 77)

Though he died on October 15, 1918, Shirdi Sai Baba is still revered by Hindu and Muslim followers as a foremost saint. Many believe he was an incarnation of Shiva who, through his spiritual practice, became an incarnation of Dattatreya.

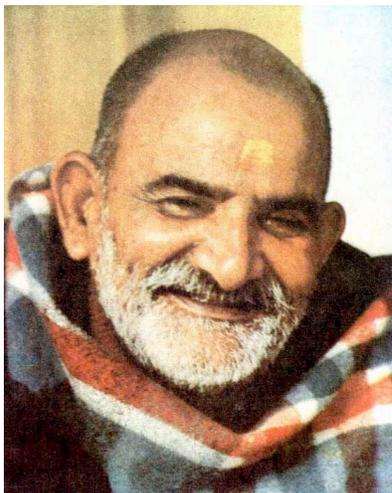
Shirdi Baba attempted to reconcile Hinduism and Islam through his life and teachings, and emphasized the importance of devotion to God

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sai_Baba_of_Shirdi). In times of tension among the religions, he claimed that he was “neither Muslim nor Hindu” but rather, was

“everything” (Kaleshwar, p. 98).

When meeting with devotees Shirdi Baba was known to ask for two rupees, which symbolized Shradda (practice) and Saburi (patience) (Kaleshwar, p. 261-2). This was his way of blessing his devotees while taking their karma and negativity (Kaleshwar, p. 100).

Neem Karoli Baba



Known to followers as Maharaj-ji (great one), Neem Karoli Baba was a Hindu guru and devotee of Hanuman (the Monkey God). A life-long adept of Bhakti Yoga, he encouraged service to others (seva) as the highest form of unconditional devotion to God. He left his body on September 11, 1973

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neem_Karoli_Baba).

Wonderful quotes from Neem Karoli Baba:

“Love is the strongest medicine.”

“I do nothing. God does everything.”

“Clean the mirror of your heart and you will see God.”

(Uttal Handbook, p. 61-63)

Bhagawan Nityananda



Bhagawan Nityananda established a permanent ashram at Ganeshpuri, India and never traveled to the West. However, he powerfully impacted the West through his role as guru to Swami Muktananda. He left his body on August 8, 1961 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhagawan_Nityananda).

Wonderful Nityananda quotes:

“One must seek the shortest way and the fastest means to get back home – to turn the spark within into a blaze, to be merged in and to identify with that greater fire which ignited the spark” (Uttal Handbook, p. 70).

"It (the state of mind) should be like a lotus leaf, which though in water, with its stem in the mud and flower above, is yet untouched by both. Similarly, the mind should be kept untainted by the mud of desires and the water of distractions, even though engaged in worldly activities" (<http://www.cosmicharmony.com/Av/Nityanan/Nityanan.htm>).

Swami Muktananda

Swami Muktananda was the founder of Siddha Yoga, a religious movement based on the Hindu philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muktananda>). He claimed his spiritual journey truly began when he received Shaktipat (spiritual initiation/energy transmission) from Bhagawan Nityananda. He left his body in 1982.



Ramakrishna Paramahansa

Ramakrishna Paramahansa is “chiefly known for his high attainments in approaching God along many different paths. Most saints have one path, one line of attainment in reaching the goal. He explored each in its turn” (Uttal Handbook, p. 73-6).

After 12 years of spiritual practice Ramakrishna Paramahansa received Darshan (seeing, an audience) from the Divine Mother (Kaleshwar, p. 195-8). He left his body in 1886, and his disciples (including Vivekananda) created the Ramakrishna Math and it’s offshoot, the Vedanta Society, bringing Hinduism to the West (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramakrishna_Paramahansa).



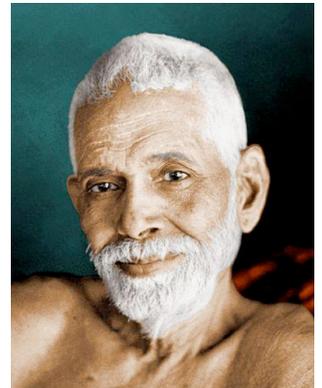
Shri Anandamayi Ma

Paramahansa Yogananda described the activities of Shri Anandamayi Ma in Chapter 45 of the spiritual classic *Autobiography of a Yogi*. “The central theme of Her teaching in endless variations was: The supreme calling of every human being is to aspire to Self-realization” (Uttal Handbook, p. 63-65).

It is said that she was “a holy woman without formal religious training or initiation whose status was based entirely on her ecstatic states” (<http://www.om-guru.com/html/saints/anandamayi.html>). Shri Anandamayi Ma was not bound by any particular spiritual tradition, and “like many other female Indian saints stood on the edge of several religious traditions, and in the midst of none” (<http://www.om-guru.com/html/saints/anandamayi.html>). She left her body in 1981.

Ramana Maharshi

His recommended spiritual practice involved self-inquiry (vichara) using the question, “Who am I?” Ramana Maharshi wrote little and preferred silence, yet left behind a body of translations of his responses to devotees questions (http://www.arunachala-ramana.org/about_bhagavan.html). “Though his primary teaching is associated with Non-dualism, Advaita Vedanta, and Jnana yoga, he highly recommended Bhakti, and gave his approval to a variety of paths and practices” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramana_Maharshi). He left his body in 1950.



DATTA TEACHERS

Sri Kaleshwar of Penukonda



Kaleshwar Anupati was born just before dawn on Tuesday, the 8th of January 1973, in the township of Madhavaram, Cuddapah District, in the state of Andhra Pradesh in southern India.

People from around the world have witnessed Swami Kaleshwar’s divine gifts: hundreds of miracles have been documented; thousands and thousands have experienced healings by him; his books and teachings reveal knowledge never before given to the world; he travels the globe helping and healing more and more people each year, as well as giving talks on the depth and breadth of the sacred knowledge of India that

has been passed down to him. Yet, when asked what he feels is his greatest gift to the world, he simply says, "My students."

Sri Kaleshwar's mission is to change the way spirituality is practiced—to bring a new level of spirituality to all mankind—one that brings happiness to every person's heart—one that will change the world's belief system. This is his duty, his dharma. Everything he does is to fulfill this pledge. Sri Kaleshwar says: "Spirituality means to know about yourself, who you are, where you came from, what is the purpose of your being born on this planet, and the next life. What are all these illusions? What is life and death? The real bliss is how much you love yourself. When you start to love yourself, you can love somebody else."

Shirdi Baba, Jesus, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Ramana Maharshi and Sri Kaleshwar are part of this Divine Lineage (www.kaleshwar.org).

Philip Lipetz, PhD



Philip Lipetz was one of Swami Kaleshwar's first Western students. He has had a lifelong spiritual connection with the renowned Indian Saint Shirdi Sai Baba who died in 1918 and was an early student who enjoyed great personal access to the renowned Indian Saint Swami Mutkananda. After years of study Philip discovered the hidden Dattatreya teachings lineage of the Indian saints through the assistance of a siddhi (supernatural power) granted him by Swami Muktananda to understand hidden meanings of sacred Indian texts. This understanding allowed him

to recognize Sri Kaleshwar as a master in the hidden Dattatreya lineage.

Philip studied for years with Swami Kaleshwar in India, writing a dozen books on this great master. Sri Kaleshwar publicly called Philip one of his "soul parents and soul partners" and has written that Philip has "amazing abilities" and is a "super powerful representative on behalf of me." Philip was singled out of the entire Kaleshwar ashram to receive the powerful Dattatreya teachings, beginning in 1997. His mission is to bring the Dattatreya energy into the world.

DATTATREYA KIRTAN

This booklet presents information on the Bhakti approach to Kirtan as it has emerged from its historical roots to its modern day manifestation.

Over the past few years a Dattatreya Approach to Kirtan has begun to emerge, one that transcends and includes the Bhakti approach. This powerfully inclusive approach integrates the material and spiritual worlds, individual and collective approaches, masculine and feminine energies and the energies of Brahma (creation/Creativity), Vishnu (sustenance/Love) and Shiva (dissolution/Consciousness).

This is the topic of a second booklet, soon to be released.

BHAKTI KIRTAN IN THE WEST

Below is a list of some of the top Western Bhakti Kirtan artists. A great place to get more info on the Western Bhakti Kirtan scene is www.kirtanconnection.com.

WHO'S ON THE SCENE?

- Krishna Das
- Jai Uttal
- Bhagavan Das
- Wah!
- Dave Stringer
- Durga Das (David Newman)
- Girish
- Snatam Kaur
- Deva Premal and Miten
- Ragani
- Sat Kartar Khalsa
- Sean Johnsen
- Shantala (Benjy and Heather Wertheimer)
- Donna DeLory
- Wade Imre Morrissette
- Wynne Paris
- MC Yogi
- Karnamrita Dasi
- Robert Gass
- Vaiyasaki Das and many others!

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

- Avatar – human incarnation of the Divine (i.e, Sita, Ram, Krishna, Radhe)
Baba – father
Bhakti – the path of the Heart, devotion, love, relationship. Loving devotion to God.
Darshan – seeing, an audience with, a vision of a holy person or deity.
Dattatreya – three faced Deity, guru of Deities, simultaneously Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.
Durge – fierce and protective form of the Divine Mother.
Ganapati – common name for Ganesh
Ganapateyaji – common name for Ganesh
Ganesh – elephant headed God who is remover of obstacles.
Gum – seed sound for Ganesh
Guru – dispeller of darkness.
Hanuman – the Monkey God (aka Anjaneya) is a symbol of selfless service and devotion to God.
Hare Om Tat Sat – I am That.
Japa – to repeat, repetition of a mantra.
Kali – fierce form of the Divine Mother.
Kali Yuga – the current era/age, an age of spiritual darkness in which is it ironically easiest to reach God.
Kirtan - 'to sing,' the practice of repetitive chanting/singing Sanskrit mantras in call and response fashion to the Divine.
Krishna – incarnation of Vishnu. Consort is Radhe.
Laxmi – Goddess of prosperity, consort to Vishnu.
Maheshwari – highly forgiving and compassionate form of the Divine Mother.
Mantra - Mind-release. Mind-protection. Mind-dissolver. A skillful way to manage and move beyond mental chatter. Sacred word, verse or formula.
Mata – mother
Namoh/Namaha – invoke, bow to, and call on the energy of..
Om – universal sound, beginning/middle/end
Om Naomi Bhagavate Vasudeveya – Thy Will, not my will, be done.
Om Namah Shivaya – adoration to Shiva.
Om Sai Shree Sai Jay Jay Sai-ee – Shirdi Sai Baba's mantra
Para – supreme, universal
Paramaguru – the spiritual lineage (guru, guru's guru, etc.)
Prem(a) – pure love for God.
Ram – incarnation of Vishnu, main character in the Ramayana. Consort is Sita.
Radhe – incarnation of Laxmi. Consort to Krishna.
Sai – Holy One
Sanskrit - an ancient language from which Hindu mantras are derived.
Saraswati – Goddess of knowledge, music and the arts. Consort to Brahma.
Shirdi – town in India
Shiva – auspicious one, one of the Hindu trinity, the destroyer of attachment/illusion.
Shyam – another name for Krishna.
Sita – incarnation of Laxmi, sub character in Ramayana. Consort of Ram.
Yoga – to 'yoke,' integrate, unite, connect.

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MIKE COHEN KIRTAN LYRICS MAY 2010

<p>GANESH INVOCATION Om Gum Gum Gum Ganapateyei Namaha</p> <p>GANESHA SHARANAM (M. Cohen) 1. Gum Gum Ganapateyei Namaha, Ganesha Sharanam, Sharanam Ganesha 2. Sai-Isha Sharanam, Sharanam Ganesha 3. Gum Gum Ganapateyei Namaha, Namaha Namaha, Gum Gum Ganapateyei Namaha</p> <p>GURU OM (M. Cohen) 1. Om Jaya Guru Om, Jaya Guru Om 2. Guru Om, Guru Om, Guru Om, Jaya Guru Om</p> <p>GURU GURU PARAMAGURU (M. Cohen) 1. Om Guru, Guru Guru, Paramaguru. 2. Hare Om Tat Sat Jai Guru Datta, Hare Om Tat Sat Jai. 3. Hare, Hare Om.</p> <p>HARE OM SHIVAYA (M. Cohen) 1. Om Namah Shivaya, Om Namah Shivaya 2. Hare Om, Shivaya Hare Om, Shivaya 3, Om Sai Shree Sai, Jay Jay Sai-eee</p> <p>OM NAMOH BHAGAVATE VASUDEDVEYAA (M. Cohen) 1. Om Namoh Bhagavate Vasudeveyaa 2. Ram Ram Sita Ram 3. Govinda Gopala, Govinda Govinda Gopala 4. Ram Ram Sita Ram, Jay Hanuman</p> <p>KALI DURGE (M. Cohen) Om Mata Kali, Om Mata Durge Kali Durge Namoh Namah, Kali Durge Namoh Namah</p> <p>JAYA RADHA (M. Cohen) Jaya Radhe Govinda Gopala Jaya, Jaya, Jaya, Jaya Radhe</p>	<p>UMA PARVATI (M. Cohen) Durga Durga Kali Ma, Durga Durga Jaya Ma Uma Parvati Ananda Mahi Om Sai Shree Sai Jay Jay Sai-ee</p> <p>OM DATTATREYA (M. Cohen) Om Namah Shivaya, Shivaya Namah Om Om Dattatreya</p> <p>SHIVA OM (M. Cohen) 1. Om Shiva, Om Shiva, Om Shiva Om Om Shiva, Om Shiva, Om Shiva Om 2. Om Namah Shivaya, Om Namah Shivaya 3. Shiva, Shiva, Shiva, Shiva, Om Namah Shivaya</p> <p>SHREE RAM JAY RAM (M. Cohen) 1. Shree Rama Jay Ram, Jay Jay Ram. 2. Sita Rama Bolo, Radhe Shama Bolo. 3. Sita Ram. Sita Ram. Sita Ram. Sita Ram. 4. Sita Rama, Sita Rama, Sita Rama...</p> <p>HANUMAN BOLO (M. Cohen) Haunuman, Hanuman, Jay Hanuman Jay, Jay, Jay, Jay, Jay... Jay Hanuman Hanuman Bolo, Hanuman Bolo, Jay Hanuman</p> <p>MAHESHWARI MA (M. Cohen) Sarasawti Ma, Namoh Namah Maha Devi, Maha Shakti, Maha Laxmi, Maheshwari</p> <p>OM SAI GURU DEV (M. Cohen) Om Sai Guru Dev, Namoh Namah Sad Guru Sai-ee, Namoh Namah Mere Guru Dev, Namoh Namah</p> <p>CLOSING MANTRAS (Trad. Arr. M. Cohen) Twameva Mata, Cha Pita Twameva Twameva Bandhu, Cha Sakha Twameva Twameva Vidya, Dravinam Twameva Twameva Sarvam, Mama Deva Deva</p> <p>Lokha Samasta, Sukinoh Buvantu Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti</p>
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