

Happiness Through Chanting

by Ashok Nalamalapu

I was born and raised in India, where it is normal for people to be involved in expressions of religious devotion. I've been living in the US since 1987, and normal here is somewhat different.

Thus it was a gratifying and humbling experience to see thousands of white people chanting the name of Hindu deities at the Bhakti Fest in Joshua Tree, California.

People were in ecstasy in chanting Sanskrit words and dancing. People from all over the world were happy and greeting each other with great affection, sharing blankets with each other in the dust of the desert.

People didn't mind staying up into the wee hours, because it was a festival of devotion. Even a few days after leaving the Bhakti Fest, I felt elevated by the vibration of loving energy generated by the festival. We chanted for peace, well being, and love for all the people around the world.

It was a divine blessing to take Saul David Raye's yoga classes while Dave Stringer was doing live kirtan at the same time.

Out of the four paths, Raja Yoga (Conquering Internal Nature), Bhakti Yoga (Devotion), Karma Yoga (Work), and Jnana Yoga (Knowledge), Bhakti Yoga is the easiest way to realize God in this period called "Kali Yuga."

Bhakti Yoga is devotion to God with love. Chanting, meditation, reading sacred scriptures, prayer, and self-less service are a few acts of Bhakti Yoga.

Chanting sacred words and mantras is an ancient practice. Chanting creates mysterious power within. It also improves concentration. A word like "Om" creates vibrations inside and outside ourselves. As it resonates with the universal sound it unites us with all that is.

Calling the names of the incarnations of divinity awakens the divinity within us. Chanting is a form of meditation. When we chant with concentration and love we feel blissful.

When we chant as a group, it creates peace and unity among people of different faiths. As we happily chant we feel the divineness. One does not have to understand the words. They are simple words. Some leaders call these words while the participants respond by repeating. Other leaders prefer to sing along with the participants. One does not have to be a trained musician to sing these words. It has been said that some peace in the world is created by the vibrations of these chants.

One of the chant leaders of international stature is Wah! I interviewed her about chanting, which is called Kirtan in Sanskrit.

Ashok: What is chanting?

Wah: The repetition of a mantra using song and melody. It is different than silent meditation, but its goal is the same: stillness of the mind and an open heart.

Ashok: What are the benefits of chanting?

Wah: Gathering together with others and sharing an experience of openness.

Masaru Emoto says the most powerful words he used in his work with water were "Love" and "Gratitude". When you come together as a group to experience love and gratitude, it is greater than if you sang, prayed, or meditated alone.

Ashok: Where do you chant?

Wah: You can chant anywhere: in your car, at your altar in the morning, in the shower, while you chop vegetables, and while walking. It is designed to be a friend to your mind, a tool to be used at any time to remember God's hand in your life.

Ashok: How can we use or apply chanting in our everyday lives?

Wah: Get a CD and find a song you like. Put it on every day and chant to it. It's good to do it at the same time every day but that is not required. It is good to do 10-20 minutes at a time.

I also use the CD to play a track all night. Select one mantra and put it on "repeat," then set the volume low enough so you can hear it but not be so distracted you can't fall asleep. Let it play and soothe your brain while you sleep. You will be amazed at how you will feel when you wake in the middle of the night and hear the mantra. It is quite lovely.

Ashok: How did you first get into chanting?

Wah: During my undergraduate years at Oberlin College & Conservatory they offered a class on Raga – teaching classical Indian music on western orchestral instruments. I took the class

on violin. The class led me to learn tabla and Indian singing and bhajans and mantras... It just kind of took off from there.

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