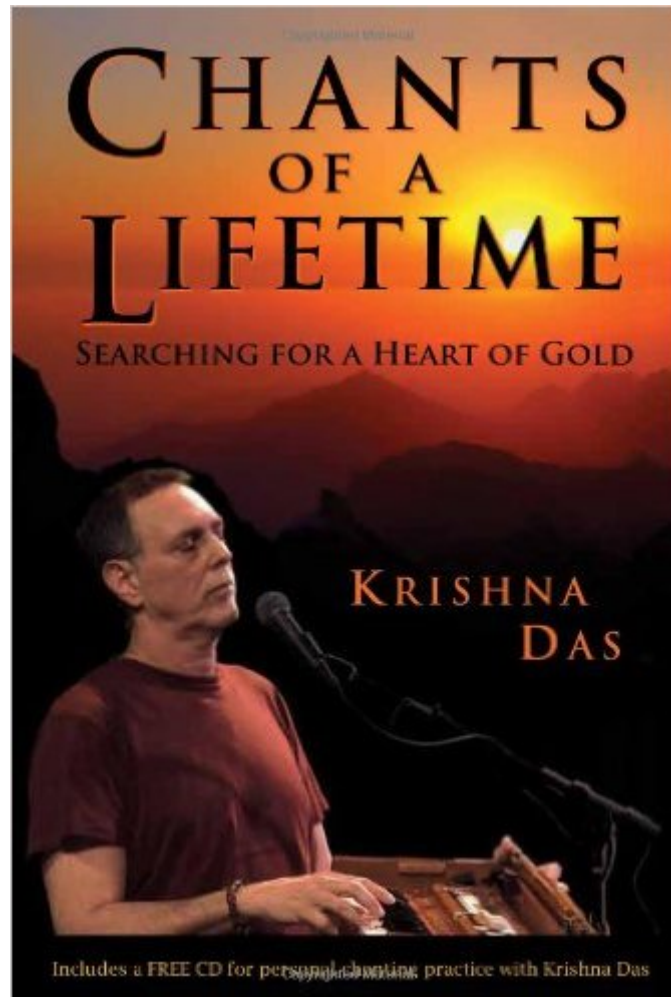


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Chants Of A Lifetime: Searching For A Heart Of Gold



Synopsis

Chants of a Lifetime offers an intimate collection of stories, teachings, and insights from Krishna Das, who has been called "the chant master of American yoga" by the New York Times. Since 1994, the sound of his voice singing traditional Indian chants with a Western flavor has brought the spiritual experience of chanting to audiences all over the world. He has previously shared some of his spiritual journey through talks and workshops, but now he offers a unique book-and-CD combination that explores his fascinating path and creates an opportunity for just about anyone to experience chanting in a unique and special way. Chants of a Lifetime includes photos from Krishna Das's years in India and also from his life as a kirtan leader, and the CD that is offered exclusively in the book consists of a number of "private" chanting sessions with the author. Instead of just being performances of chants for listening, the recordings make it seem as if Krishna Das himself is present for a one-on-one chanting session. The idea is for the listener to explore his or her own practice of chanting and develop a deepening connection with the entire chanting experience.

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Customer Reviews

In May of 1973, when I first met Ram Dass in Tampa, Florida, a young fellow named "Krishna Das" was traveling with him. "K.D.," as we came to refer to him, was a quiet, gentle soul who - in those days - spoke softly and infrequently. But when he sang, his songs to God opened up the Heavens . . . and pure Love and Light poured from his heart, and from the hearts of those who had the opportunity to be in the "Presence" his songs invoked. It was May 22, 1973. We were sitting on

"Crescent Hill" on the campus of the University of South Florida as the sun was setting in the West. Krishna Das was leading nearly 3000 people in the Indian form of devotional singing known as "kirtan." Celestial music began to flow in, and out, and around, and through the gathering . . . floating on the warm, majestic, tropical evening breeze . . . holy sounds magically lifting our hearts into the realms of the Spirit. Now, some 37 years later, Krishna Das has become known as the foremost "kirtan-walla" in America . . . an accolade that is well deserved because he is simply the best. And it is my pleasure and honor to be able to highly recommend his new auto-biography . . . a beautiful journey of the heart . . . Chants of a Lifetime . . . It is the story of a profound journey from confusion and emptiness into the Heart of Love. Anyone who lived through the Sixties and Seventies, or who seeks a greater understanding of the spiritual transformations those years engendered will find this book both fascinating and insightful. And anyone who is interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the many dimensions of yoga will find much to savor and reflect on in this delightful, inspirational story of one man's sincere search for the path to Truth . . . and his exuberant gratitude about finding it.

I don't lose books. I lost this one. A few years ago, I bought "Chants of a Lifetime" in Los Angeles, got on the plane, read a few chapters, put it aside and walked off the plane without it. I realized right away I didn't have it. But I didn't go back for it. You read books when you're ready for them. Clearly I wasn't ready for the memoir of a desperately unhappy kid who falls in love with Neem Karoli Baba, finds ultimate happiness through his guru, loses it and regains it by chanting the names of God in a language he doesn't understand. What changed for me? First is an echo of a decades-ago conversation I had with the great short story writer Andre Dubus. I asked him why he went to Mass every day. He said; "Because if Ronald Reagan defines ultimate reality, I'd have to shoot myself!" That's pretty much how I have come to feel about most of what now passes for news: If this is reality, I need to find something else. Better believe I have looked hard. And found lots of wisdom. But nothing grabbed me, shook me, calmed me until I encountered the music of Krishna Das. For the last few years, my wife and I have been going to his evenings at a church on the West Side. I am so not a chanter, so not a joiner, so not a seeker after a guru. But I have cherished these evenings. Last year, we brought the child, who complained briefly, then drifted into a beatific snooze. And now I find I'm noticing a convergence of my head with others. A friend and I were talking about the music in heavy rotation in our lives. I said I was mostly listening to Krishna Das. "I don't know why," I said, "but I feel Krishna Das helps me deal with a lot of the junk that's in my way." "You and a lot of people," she said, to my great surprise. So it seemed like maybe this was the

time for me to read "Chants of a Lifetime: Searching for a Heart of Gold." It starts with Krishna Das --- the former Jeffrey Kagel, from and of Long Island --- about to return to America. He never thought this would happen; he'd hoped to stay with his guru forever. Now he was being sent back: "I blurted out in anguish, 'Maharaj-ji! How can I serve you in America?' He looked at me with mock disgust and said, 'What is this? If you ask how you should serve, then it is no longer service. Do what you want.' I couldn't believe my ears. How could doing what I wanted to do be of service to him? I didn't have that kind of faith. I just sat there, stunned. Then after a minute or so he looked over at me, smiling sweetly, and asked, 'So, how will you serve me?' 'My mind was blank. It was time for me to leave for Delhi, to catch the plane back to the States. He was looking at me and laughing. I bent down and touched his feet for the last time and when I looked up he, he was beaming at me, 'So, how will you serve me in America?' I felt like I was moving in a dream. I floated across the courtyard and bowed to him one more time from a distance. As I did, the words came to me, 'I will sing to you in America.'"

This memoir is about getting to that moment, blowing it (a crack addiction), recovering, building a following for Hindu chanting, blowing it again (in 2002, Krishna Das pled guilty to a federal charge of money laundering and was sentenced to three years probation and six months house arrest), and moving on to bigger audiences and greater CD sales. It's the usual story: an angel with a dirty face. Just like you. Just like me. Only here the contrasts are all in High Def. I'm not much for reading about someone else's God-intoxication. I prefer teaching stories, anecdotes, dish --- an adventure story --- punctuated by killer one-liners. By this standard, "Chants" is a classic. It starts with Kagel's hilarious encounter with the Army physical. Quickly serves up a picture of Kagel in his bearded, long-haired Jesus moment. And then delivers the guru, the embodiment of divine love. But this book does not read "holy." Consider this, on his guru: "He didn't teach with words. He'd shine light on me like the sun, and I'd bloom. When the clouds came between us, I saw that they were my own clouds. Then I would sit there, freaking out, 'What the ---! I can't do anything about this.'" And in the end? "I feel like I'm the same jerk I always was," Krishna Das writes, "but I don't think about myself as much as I used to." For most of the child's life, my wife has put her to bed with a lecture called "Bore Me to Sleep." Exports, the Bill of Rights, what to visit in a dozen countries --- my wife has developed quite the repertoire. My wife is away for a few days, so the bedtime boredom ritual has fallen to me. Last night, my first on the job, I told stories. I rubbed her back. Nothing worked. In desperation, I reached for this book. After a few minutes, the child asked me to stop. "Too interesting," she said. Out of the mouths of babes...

The great Hatha Yogi and teacher, TKV Desikachar, once said, "If you tell a person who cannot find

their own house that there is a pot of gold inside, they would be happier had they not had this information. What use is the gold if it cannot be found? It only causes pain. First, they must find the house and enter it. Then there are many possibilities." His message outlines the dilemma peculiar to our age and culture for those of us embarking on a spiritual path today. We long for the promised gold of love that (we are told) lies at the heart of our true nature, but our history--in the West particularly--has been to seek our treasure on the outside. We have not been taught how to love ourselves. It is dark in this place, and we have lost our way home. In his new book, *Chants of A Lifetime: Searching for a Heart of Gold*, Krishna Das gives us the story of his own path and, in the offering, provides us with a light to help guide us on our return journey home. With the characteristic informality, warmth and humor that we have come to know as his signature style at his kirtans, KD chronicles the story of a spiritual journey that is American at its roots. He is no yogi who might seem to be talking to us from a world set on high and apart. We know him; his trials are familiar to us. He is our son, our brother, our father, our friend. His unflinching honesty regarding his setbacks along the way is all the more assurance for us that what he has to say about grace and developing a practice is real and accessible to us right now--just as we are. His journey--setting out as a young man from New York, to India and receiving the grace of his guru, Neem Karoli Baba, and back again--is more than a story of redemption passed down from a saint, nor are his spiritual lessons restricted to the singing of Hindu chants. When Maharaj-ji (his guru) died, KD's work was to re-integrate the lessons that he learned at his feet, to find "home" within himself. His life travels led him to explore beyond any one set of spiritual practices, to discover those that, followed over time--"gradually, but inevitably"--began to dissolve the veil of the false self. He offers his map--the practices of Lovingkindness meditation, chanting the names of God--as the means through which we, too, may develop faith based in a personal understanding that the gold that we are looking for exists, and can be found. Enclosed for our use with the book, we are given a cd of chants; we can begin our journey immediately.

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