



# Hare Hare, Krishna Krishna? > Colleen Cackowski

Many of us, living lives full of cell phones, rush hours and wireless internet, long for a sense of peace. And so it is that, as with many things Eastern, we are discovering *mantra*, or chanting, to be an effective means to bring us to a direct experience of being, free from concept or theology. Now, repeating foreign words over and over might not sound like your idea of a good time. But, while chanting can help de-stress and energize, it's really fun, too!

Chanting is anything but new. Mantras, or "seed sounds," are typically chanted in Sanskrit, the language of ancient India. Beyond literal meaning, these sacred words—when repeated with intention—are thought to carry energy in the sound of the syllables. But this isn't just mystical mumbo-jumbo. Scientifically speaking, human neurophysiology is affected by repetitive sounds. Our *Reticular Activating System* (RAS) is responsible for detecting new stimuli. If there is a change in the environment, the RAS alerts the brain. When stimuli become repetitive, however—as in chanting—the RAS disengages, which has a quieting effect on the brain.

German-horn mantra enchantress Deva Premal explains: "Physically the body becomes energized, the cells respond and vibrate and energy can move freely. Chanting

removes energy blocks. On a metaphysical level, when you sing, the heart opens. That's why all the religions and traditions have made so much singing in their rituals. When the heart opens, you feel good. It's that simple." The musical experience with Deva and her partner, Miten, is unusual in that it's not about performance. According to the artists, "all personalities are dissolved for a tiny, sacred moment."

Local kirtan and chanting groups are springing up all over. Unlike other musical concerts, people return to the same kirtan, week after week, month after month. Andrew (Vamadeva) Campagnola leads a kirtan in Boulder, Colorado, at Studio Be, which has grown from 8 to almost 100 people: "people find nourishment in an atmosphere that is warm and safe to let go and drop their personal boundaries into an experience of oneness. I have watched those attending regularly, immersing themselves in the pool of energy, transform. They relax, open their hearts and dissolve into a deeper connection with themselves." Scott Medina leads kirtans at Boulder's StarHouse: "when people experience their first kirtan...they appear like a little kid who has just discovered something wild...they often tell me, 'I had no idea what I was missing!'"

Kirtan 'celeb' Krishna Das packed 700 into a small space on his last visit. "From the




## KIRTANS NEAR YOU

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- > **September 10** Wynne Paris/Scott Medina  
> The StarHouse, west of Boulder, Colorado
- > **September 11** Wynne Paris  
> Iyengar Yoga Center, Denver, Colorado
- > **September 12** Wynne Paris/Andrew Campagnola > Studio Be, Boulder
- > **October 28** Krishna Das, Ty Burhoe  
> Flatirons Theater, Boulder
- > **October 30** Krishna Das, Ty Burhoe > Naropa University Extended Studies
- > **November 5** Dave Stringer > Studio Be
- > **November 6** Dave Stringer  
> Denver Ashtanga Yoga Center
- > **December 4** Wah! > Prasad Yoga, Boulder
- > **December 5** Wah! > Iyengar Yoga, Denver

yogic point of view, we are not actually doing this...our egos think we're doing it, but in fact, it's a deeper part of us that's doing it." But kirtan isn't always introspective. Wynne Paris: "When this started 100's of years ago in India, kirtan was not a seated, austere affair. People would dance, sing and pray themselves into states of spiritual ecstasy. The more whole-hearted and full-bodied the participation, the greater the benefit."

Each kirtan wallah (leader) adds his or her own flavor to the mix. Dave Stringer performs with an ensemble of five or six musicians, which "allows us to morph from classical Indian to cool jazz ensemble to arena rock band, and back, in an instant. These are the forms that Western audiences relate to, and it gives them a context to find their way in." Wah!, former back-up musician and vocalist for Krishna Das, says: "Chanting brings people together. Some people dance, some sit and meditate, some clap to the music."

Ten years ago, if anyone had told me I'd be blissing out, chanting all night long, I would have thought they had a screw loose. Now, you can't keep me away. 

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