

## Kirtan: How Chants Can Heal the Heart



Meditation doesn't come easy for many people. And that's where kirtan-an ancient participatory music experience-offers another method. Without the work of mentally quieting the mind, kirtan can carry us effortlessly to a place of quiet, to stillness. One of the oldest sacred music traditions of the world, the kirtan call-and-response chanting genre comes to us from India. Using ancient Sanskrit mantras, the kirtan calls upon sacred energies which serve to quiet the mind, remove obstacles, and bring us back to the centre of our being.

By repeating simple mantras over and over, faster and faster, the kirtan is an easy way for people to experience some freedom from the daily chatter of the mind. And while it is true that we can sing these chants in the solitude of our own home, there is nothing like the magic of chanting live with musicians and hundreds of participants-from kids to seniors-all adding their energy to the chant. People often say they feel "buzzed" for days following such a chanting experience.

### **Absorb the Vibrations, Ignite the Spirits**

So what gives us that buzz? Something about the kirtan experience goes beyond the music itself, goes to a deeper experience of vibration. We all resonate at different frequencies, and these frequencies change according to what we are doing and thinking. So when we are all doing the same thing-chanting, breathing, and moving to the same rhythms-our vibrations begin to synchronize and the resulting experience is very powerful. The laws of vibration help us out here, because vibrations align themselves to stronger vibrations, so even if you're having a truly rotten day, it may be difficult to hold onto those feelings during the chant experience. If you were only to sit in the room without participating, the idea is that you could still feel the shift. Something happens-the energy begins to activate the spirit that exists within us all.

### **It's the Heart, not the Art!**

Although the kirtan involves music, the underlying art of kirtan chanting is not actually about musical ability or training-it is about the heart. Everyone can participate, regardless of age or cultural background. The purpose of this music is to get us out of our heads and into our hearts. Typically, the songs can last for 20-30 minutes each with a few moments of silence in between each song so you can soak it all up. The longer songs allow for deeper experience of the effects, and with the simple, repetitive lyrics (it's a chant, after all!) we really don't have to think much about the words.

## **Chants Heal**

In fact, because the ancient Sanskrit lyrics are not familiar to many of us Westerners, these words take us away from the mind's constant chatter a little easier. The powerful healing and transformational energies of these ancient chants can help to reconnect us to the Ever-Present and Eternal Being that lies within us all. All the mantras, melodies, and instruments of kirtan are designed to lead us toward this meditative state.

## **The Beauty of Relaxation!**

We provide floor seating in the traditional style of kirtan events in India (and yes, we also provide chairs for those who prefer chairs), and this living-room style music experience allows people to sink into themselves, to relax and ground themselves during the chants. Most of us spend the day in our heads, running here and there, and thinking about where we have to be and what we have to do next. The kirtan gives us a time to come back to our centre. And when this happens, beautiful things begin to unfold. Feelings of inspiration, peace, and a sense of connectedness are common experiences.

## **Experience Peace, First Hand!**

"The first time I came to a kirtan, I felt so peaceful, so relaxed," comments Amy, who now regularly participates in the Milwaukee kirtan experience. "Something happens during the kirtan, and I get this deep sense of inner peace and connectedness." Amy is not the only one with these experiences; a few hundred people attend the monthly Milwaukee kirtan event, and they often return with their friends the next month. "It's like you go into a space-the music takes you there-and when you emerge at the end, you feel different, more energized and inspired," says Jeff, another kirtan buff.

## **Quiet Your Mind, Feel Your Self!**

Kirtan helps the mind become quiet, and when the mind quiets, we can begin to perceive the mystical things, the sacred experiences, that are around us always. In the silence between the songs, when the song stops, you can feel something. And that something is you. There is no greater experience than the experience of one's Self. And that vibration is always within you, that vibration is you. That's the beauty of any chant experience-with little or no effort we can experience and enjoy the vibrations of peace, energy, healing and inspiration that are always within us.

## **We give thanks to 'Ragani - Kirtan Exponent' for sharing her experience**