

Mala Liner Notes

India blasted me into billions of spinning particles and then slowly reshaped me, a process that was somehow both excruciating and ecstatic. I can't begin to claim complete knowledge of all of the layers of philosophy represented by the mantras I learned to chant while I was there, but I can attest to their power. I'm not a Sanskrit scholar and not always a particularly focused devotee, but I am deeply committed to the process of inquiry that the practice of yoga suggests.

I once read that Thomas Jefferson took a copy of the Bible and cut out the parts that most resonated with him, then reassembled his selections into a work that reflected his own way of saying his prayers. I suppose it is fair to say that as an artist, I am engaged in something of a similar process with yoga. I don't know exactly where the journey I am making ends. I'm just trying to report honestly from where I am.

Kirtan is rooted in a very old and profoundly joyful Eastern tradition. But I don't know that it is possible for me to be traditional. As a Westerner, I can't help but bring my own cultural biases with me. My intention, however, is to be authentic, in the sense that what I am doing originates in my heart. For me, to align the individual-dissolving Eastern tradition of kirtan with the individual-affirming Western traditions of gospel and jazz and rock music is no contradiction. Both arise from the same impulse toward expressing what is ecstatic and liberating and transcendent.

Mantras are intended as a tool with which the spirit can release itself from the prison of attachments that the mind creates. It's not unfair to say that the chanting of mantras is intended to be a completely mindless activity. Yoga doesn't ask us to believe, it asks us to practice, examining our experience until we can witness the truth in the book of our own heart. My only suggestion is that you chant along. Whether these mantras are ancient wisdom or psychological metaphor or complete nonsense is up to you.