

THE COMPOSING OF "COSMIC CHANTS"

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Refer to 1963 and 1974 editions of Yogananda's chant book, page xv top paragraph: "This revised and enlarged edition of Cosmic Chants has been compiled by a committee of several direct-disciples of Paramhansa Yogananda who had heard him in various periods of his life. During the past year the committee sat with an experienced musician who wrote out, phrase by phrase, each person's rendition of each chant....The committee compared the various renditions and selected the most representative for this edition." I am that "experienced musician" referred to here, being a then-monastic compiler of the chant book during my fifteen years of resident service (1955-1970), living thirteen of those years at the Master's international headquarters atop Mount Washington in the Highland Park suburb of Los Angeles.

At this time, some 35+ years after that two-year period of "gathering" work, I continue to find that the 61 chants gathered, 60 in the published book, remain mentally available for my private use, quickly brought accurately to mind from my memory storehouse - a treasured benefit from that time of gratifying service to my Guru's work, now in the distant past. But I am not motivated to write this paper for self-promotion! Rather, I suddenly feel a long neglected responsibility to clarify what can be misunderstood-by-omission, reading "acknowledgments" which end the INTRODUCTION section at the front of the chant book. (page xv)

I wrote the main contents of the INTRODUCTION section, except for the acknowledgments ending, added by Editorial Dept. This was an excellent addition, which made more evident the great cultural heritage of these chants. At the same time, a superlative creative skill of Paramhansa Yogananda is overlooked if not overshadowed, because of its not being made a part of acknowledgment information - here rectified. First, let me list these acknowledged sources for specified chants, representing the great cultural heritage of chanting in India.

Rabindranath Tagore (Nobel prize-winning poet and composer):

"Thou Art My Life (words & music)," "Who Is In My Temple (words)," and "Light The Lamp Of Thy Love (words)."

Guru Nanak (Sikh tradition): "O God Beautiful"

Sri Chaitanya (Vaishnava tradition): "Spirit And Nature"

Swami Sankaracharya (founder of Swami monasticism): "No Birth, No Death"

Swami Ram Tirtha (unique for the demonstration of will force in his spiritual striving): "Swami Ram Tirtha's Song (None Can 'Tone Me)"
(words from his poem; melody source uncertain)

Sri Ram Prosad (18th century Bengali saint-composer of magnificent bhajan devotional songs): "Will That Day Come To Me?"

Bengali Songs (original sources unknown): "Desire, My Great Enemy," "Wake, Yet Wake, O My Saint," "What Lightning Flash," "Door Of My Heart," "Where Is There Love," "Deliver Us From Delusion," "They Have Heard Thy Name," and "Divine Mother's Song To The Devotee."

Traditional Sanskrit Temple Chant (introduced by a visiting swami after the passing of Yogananda in 1952): "Hymn to Brahma"

Ella Richey (American Kriyaban disciple of Yogananda): "Om Song"
(her music set to his poem)

Here is my point of clarification. All but the last two chants of the above were re-composed from their original musical forms by Yogananda, adapting his English language translation of the other-language lyrics to his own created melodies, either newly composed or adapted from the originals - thus producing chants that were in his unique and simple melodic style, enjoyably assimilated by his American family of disciples. It is my personal conviction that the Master put himself purposely in attunement with the world of American popular music, to influence the formation of his own unique composing style for the chants, which provided that immediately-attractive, aesthetic appeal for Americans. (Refer to the Carnegie Hall experience, below.)

It is foolishness to equate these chants, as some have, with the vocal element of India's classical raga system. However, it certainly can be said that India's bhajan song style is reflected in the devotional and song-like nature of Yogananda's chant compositions. But this said, as a musician long-experienced in the popular music field, also trained in classical music

theory and familiar with India's raga, bhajan, and kriti (South India) musical forms, I emphasize here that Yogananda was either the composer or, as I term it, the re-composer of all but a very few compositions in "Cosmic Chants," creating in his inspired, simple and natural, style akin to pre-1950 American popular music.

In this plain and simple fact is contained a dynamic spiritual reflection of his unique, highly practical, creative powers, applied to his spiritual mission in the West. Understating, I like to say to the uninitiated that Paramhansa Yogananda was a creative artist of psychological genius, fully in attunement with Americans!

BIRTH OF THE CHANTS

The years of my residency among direct-disciples of Paramhansa Yogananda included anecdotes from several of them relating to the chants and chanting, a few I will enjoy relating here. I will try to make it as concise and accurate as I can.

The very beginning of Yogananda's composing chants did not happen until he went on several days of isolated retreat in New England in the 1920's with a disciple of Swami Ram Tirtha who was visiting the U.S. They agreed to spend their retreat days in total silence toward each other. But this did not prohibit his companion from chanting audibly the uplifting Vedic prayers and invocations of his heritage, adding devotional bhajans that inspired him. By the end of the retreat days he was in a very exalted state of consciousness.

Perceiving his state, as Yogananda later explained, he considered this Guidance for him to begin creating chants that would appeal to American hearts and minds. And so he began - "O God Beautiful", as he relates, being sung enthusiastically "by "thousands of voices of the entire audience" for close to an hour and a half (!), at a New York Carnegie Hall series of public lectures in 1926. "Even after I had left the stage, the audience sat on, chanting the song."

I have no knowledge of the Master's creative process, except one description, told to me by a direct-disciple who was there early on. In those early days at what was then called the Mount Washington Educational Center in Los Angeles, Yogananda would sit in deep meditation with several resident disciples. He would then come out of his silence quietly singing a new

chant creation - the disciples joining in the repetitions as words and melody became clear. Later, they would ask to repeat the chant with Guru, and it would be resung, perhaps now with a few little variations which more or less became set in varying memories through the years. Because of this situation along with a few other considerations (after all, they weren't trained musicians!), differing melodic or rhythmic versions of each chant became evident over time among different direct-disciples. Because interiorizing and devotional purposes of chanting are primary, this was really not a problem among resident disciples at any time.

But with the growth in numbers of outside students and members studying the great Preceptor's how-to-live Kriyaban teachings with devotional ideals, it became desirable to publish a book of "standardized" versions of the chants. Being an experienced professional musician trained in composer theory, skilled in accurate musical notation of what I hear, and for years at that time a resident brahmachari, I was the right person at the right time to put to work on the project. And so I began.

"THE SPIRIT OF CHANTING"

Undertaking this project, I had the great help in those earlier years of hearing several direct-disciples sing many chants at meditations: my personal counselor, Dr. M.W. Lewis (his Friday night "community sings" at Hollywood India Center long meditations, with Doctor accompanying the assembly on Hammond organ, were later irreplaceable); Bro. Kriyananda (truly, a then troubadour of the chants, heard on discontinued recordings #201-202 - on which I played tabla drums); Sr. Mrinalini (who, though not publicly heard, was, from a chance hearing, the most beautiful I heard in her chanting - and from whom I notated the short version of "When My Dream's Dream Is Done"); Sr. Sahaja (in my opinion, by far the most representative instrumentalist for the chants, playing them for years as organist at Yogananda's Hollywood & San Diego church services); Sr. Daya (no doubt the most effective promoter of devotional, if not "scientific," chanting among residents); and last but certainly not least, Sr. Durga, whom Yogananda had praised repeatedly as demonstrating "the spirit of chanting."

While notating chant versions sitting with the committee that later made final decisions (Sisters Daya, Mrinalini, and Mataji), I also sat with Sr. Durga. Over a period of several days, I notated her clear structuring of

Guru's chants. In covering all that she knew and used, we included a high percentage of those that filled the chant book. (I also made sure we covered one of her own compositions, "O Great Babaji," that we all loved). It should be known that, of the sixty published in the 1963 edition, an added chant in the 1974 edition, the decision committee had selected thirty-one of my Durga notations without changing a single melody note or rhythm pattern. And others of her versions were also selected with a few changes here and there. Sr. Durga was the authoritative chanter of Yogananda compositions.

Beyond this, I must tell you that my memory of those several days musically working with her in her rooftop apartment at the Mother Center is well-described with three words: "kindness" and "total helpfulness." Durga had a reputation for ironlike will-power; she was a legend from her painting the entire 60-room main residence building (originally a hotel) alone, chanting "Aum Guru." This was in her arrival years among the few, back in the late 1920's. I had vaguely expected, before the visits began, some manner of toughness in her treatment of me during the project. How different it was, in her sparkling kindness, with a sweetness that emerged at times, unexpectedly. This Kshatriya will not forget strong, honest, and simple Sr. Durga.

Durga said something to me most memorable at that time which I believe is the deeper reason for Yogananda's praising her as having "the spirit of chanting." It is something easily understood but not easily practiced, as she said it to me. "I find a way to put every chant into the deep spine." Think about it, if you can!

YOGANANDA'S CHANT RECORDINGS

Before this project began I had gained years earlier an ease in notating chants for several residents, especially in my initial two years serving at the India Center colony in Hollywood (1955-57), working in the cafe kitchen with Anandamoy (as he was later called) the curry cook, among a few women disciples. I was in charge of carrot-and-other-vegetable cutting (and washing dishes in three "tamas, rajas, and sattwa" sink divisions, as I called them). And there was that ever-cheerful and friendly Swiss lady, a 63 year old working tirelessly at the hot short-order grill - rugged, yet gentle, Maria, for whom I developed a strong brotherly affection that led to my work on the chants. (Lead, kindly light!)

Thursday night and Sunday morning church services would be heard over speakers in our kitchen while we worked. So we could always hear the chanting ways of ministers of that period, mostly Dr. M.W. Lewis (Yogananda's first American disciple, by then a retired dental surgeon) and Bro. Kriyananda (at that time the Hollywood church minister, commuting from the Mt. Washington center). Kriyananda, the most musically educated of service leaders at that time, would lead chants that other leaders did not use. Maria would ask me to notate some of these for her to learn, which I did with ease from my cultivated music memory. This became known, and it was Kriyananda who suggested that I do the compiling for a new chant book, later assigned to me a few years after my transfer to residency at the international headquarters.

Beginning this project, I was comfortable entering into it with notation of versions of those chants used by Kriyananda and Dr. Lewis - chanting I could readily hear by that time as a resident where Kriyananda often led daily meditations (and with my residence room next to his). With Doctor as my counselor, attendance at his group meditations during visits to the Encinitas hermitage where he lived (along with all his Friday meditations that I had attended during India Center residency) provided ample familiarity with his popular harmonized style for a limited selection of the chants.

But in turning then to Yogananda's recordings, I felt a certain trepidation concerning my ability to accurately notate some of what he sang on the recordings. Naturally, I wanted every note he sang to be perfectly represented on the music page.

As it turned out, my notation work moved along very well on all but one of the chants taken from Guru's recordings. I must admit here, looking at "Do Not Dry The Ocean Of My Love," the three notes that have fermata signs above them (along with tr instrumental trill sign - sorry!) constitute a compromise of my inability to notate with confidence the vocalized rendition at those points in the recording - being what is called "ornamentation." Notating this chant now, I would simply omit these symbols, keeping the notes below them. The chant thus moves along quite nicely without the chanter thinking he or she must sing it with such ornamentation.

I must make one remaining reference - to "I Will Be Thine Always." This has been a popular chant through the years, included among a main body of chants selected for leading meditations and lecture services. The way it is usually sung however, leaves several parts of the rendition quite different than the way Yogananda sings it on the recording, reproduced in the chant book. Perhaps it is not that important but I much prefer the recorded version placed in the chant book. There is more of Guru's art in it. Perhaps next century!

"SCIENTIFIC" CHANTING

There are quite a few good memories I have concerning the years that riveted these chanting "powers" of upliftment and attunement in my Kriyaban lifestyle (one who daily practices the Kriya Yoga initiation technique). At the very least, I can testify knowingly to the power of mental chanting especially - whether using Yogananda's Scientific Healing Affirmations or Cosmic Chants. One such affirmation over a 42+ year span has given life and relevance in my "senior" years to a better-appreciated Truth: "I am the Infinite that has become the body. The body, as a manifestation of Spirit is the ever-youthful Spirit." Chanting indeed provides reinforcement from one's Purusha-soul.

Without making a fixation of it, let me suggest that there has been serious negligence of a vital element of "power" chanting that Yogananda clearly taught, in both Cosmic Chants and Scientific Healing Affirmations - what I call "scientific" chanting. Let me first say that when Bro. Sarvananda, as he related to me, asked Sr. Daya why this technique was missing from her promotion of chanting practices, her response, strange as it seemed in light of Guru's instructions, was that "it does not interest me" - this perspective justified as a "regimentation" of chanting practice that she could not support.

Considered with empathy toward her personal sadhana, Daya's attitude was understandable. An advanced bhakti, she felt in such a response that chanting is strictly a devotional practice that becomes degraded or lost by such "regimentation." But there is of course another understanding, from yoga shastra, in which "scientific" chanting through structured practice becomes an evolving method for using will force to cultivate a consciously-directed power of intuitive feeling which attains the super conscious experience referred to in Yogananda's chant book Prelude.

What I have been pointing at is the description in the Prelude (page xi), outlined as five states of "chanting aloud - whisper chanting - mental chanting - subconscious chanting - super conscious chanting (the latter two being developments from mental chanting)," with instruction on the following page: "Each devotee should set aside a regular time for singing these songs. Chant first aloud, then whisperingly, then mentally...In this way deep God-perception can be obtained."

I have had an Arizona Yaqui Indian craftsman custom-make a drum for self-accompaniment in this practice - especially for whisper chanting which harmonium accompaniment can distract or drown out. Whisper chanting is vital to the method. It took over fifty years for me to hear a Kriyaban minister include whisper chanting in a public service. Ram Smith, good man! my Father thanks you; my Mother thanks you; and I thank you! And perhaps you also get an astral salute from Swami Sivananda (deceased founder of the Divine Life Society), who taught this ancient three-step chanting technique in his commentary on the relevant shastra.

In teaching that chanting is "half the battle" of inner growth, Paramhansa Yogananda reflected an ancient tradition of Mantra Yoga in India where musical affirmation and invocation are spiritual "techniques." These inspiring practices have nurtured the soul evolution of unnumbered thousands, if not millions, since Vedic times.

PRONAM

To all of you who grew up on chanting without this "scientific" practice, you still have, of course, my affectionate regard as Kriyaban sadhakas or pravartakas ("The Holy Science" Revelation, Sutras 6 and 7). And most certainly, I encourage American students who aspire to that level of discipleship to use chanting in any way they feel helpful. Just know that this science of chanting is available to you when you want it.

I can only hope that this writing has brought you closer to Sr. Durga's true "spirit of chanting" in the deep spine - a Yogananda Kriyaban's wish as a Minister of the ANANDA Church of Self-Realization, founded by J. Donald Walters (Bro. Kriyananda).