



Krishna Das Spiritual Teacher, Chantmaster.

Krishna Das has been called the yoga's "rock star." He is a creator of music which touches the deepest cord in each of us. His release of "Live Anada" 2012 was nominated for a Grammy, and he is the focus of the movie "OneTrack Heart" The story of Krishna Das.

Interviewed by Lisa Cefalu

WP: You were born Jeffrey Kagel in Long Island New York, which could appear to be a far cry from Krishna Das. I wanted to ask you, what is Jeffery like? Is he much different than Krishna Das?

KD: They're the same really. Jeff is a personality and so is Krishna Das but it points to a spiritual path. Krishna Das is a spiritual aspiration!

WP: When did you feel you started to embody Krishna Das and begin to identify with that personality more than with the personality of Jeffery?

KD: I'm still working on it maybe someday. It's only been forty years don't rush me!

WP: Okay, I'm sure you are asked this all the time, but considering I see about seventeen variations of red shirts hanging behind you, what is the significance of the color Red?

KD: Maharaj-ji said, "You're Hanuman. You wear red!" He had me dye everything red even my "gotis" and underwear. Red represents the fire that burns off all kinds of impurities. He was trying to give me an identity, because I was in pretty bad shape and was recovering from a major nervous breakdown. It was something I had inside of me. It had to

do with a girlfriend that broke up with me, but it really had to do with my mother and all kinds of deep stuff in there. When I was in India, I found out that this former girlfriend had escaped from a mental institution and killed herself. At that time I was recovering from hepatitis and very weak and she came to visit me (in spirit) at night and it was really intense. The next morning I got up and went to see Maharaj-ji and he said, "Two days before", as I was telling him what I experienced he kept repeating, "Two days before" and when I stopped talking he said, "Two days before she died she thought of you." And that was exactly right. She had written me a letter two days before she died, but I didn't get it until after.

Maharaj-ji said, "Why did you leave her?" And I was shocked. I said, "I didn't leave her. She broke up with me!" But then I realized, I had been telling myself a story all these years because I had emotionally pulled back first and I had left her first, I'd forgotten that but he knew. Then my mind cleared and I could see that clearly now.

WP: Speaking of Maharaj-ji knowing everything, I read in your book "Chants Of A Lifetime", that Maharaj-ji knew everything about you even before you met him. Is that true?

KD: He knew everything about everybody. Even you right now because there's nothing in between. Past, present and future they are just like pages in a book. These great beings you can't understand them. They're like the sky that's endless and holds everything. Complete unconditional love. They don't love you as a person they love you as a God loving you with total and complete unconditional love.

WP: Did you have a sense of the divine when you were young?

KD: By the time I was sixteen I was searching. I was hoping something might be out there. There wasn't much around at the time, but I was reading; "Autobiography Of A Yogi", "Gospel Of Krishna", a book called "Yoga For Health", but when I took LSD and Peyote in my junior and senior year in high school, especially Peyote, it was like the curtain lifted and I saw what the world really was. I had no doubt that what I was seeing was more real than the world I had been living in; high school, basketball, girls, driving around in my car it all seemed tight and closed in. But when I took the peyote the world opened up. Some people take these drugs and go back to living how they were, but that was impossible for me. I saw that this is the direction they're talking about where

all spiritual paths lead to! Some transcendence experience that pushed me very strongly in the direction of the path, but because I had so much self-loathing and self-hatred for so long, I thought the spiritual path was going to take me somewhere else to something else.

WP: Some place outside of yourself?

KD: Somewhere else essentially where I wouldn't be, because I didn't like me and I didn't love me. And there was nothing but torture and neurotic bullshit in me. So as I could see it at that point the spiritual path must be to somewhere else. It took a lot of years to recognize it's a path to right here (touches his heart) through your nonsense. Right through the middle of your nonsense to who you really are. A lot of people think they have to reject stuff in their lives in order to become holy. That's complete bullshit, and a lot of teachers feed on that, on that world view a lot of Westerners have, so they encourage it and make people renunciate and very few people are ready for that.

WP: Can you elaborate on the "stuff" people have to reject? Are you referring to desires of human nature like sex and money and worldly desires?

KD: Business Swamis want to take all that energy that the people are repressing and suck it into them. Direct it unto them and have people be very one pointed on them, and of course I never liked that. You don't have to think and the swami becomes God, and you have no responsibility but to do what he says. And that's the sad state of many spiritual situations. Maharaj-ji was never like that, he never told us anything. He used to say, "My mantra is go away" which is "chalo" in Hindi. He didn't need you there, because he's not a physical being. He's everywhere, he's here, he's in the past and future. There's nowhere he's not going to be. We needed to be there so our karmas created the situation, we could get a hit and then be sent back to do our work. But these beings don't need you there. Everyone has a guru and the guru is taking care of them whether they know it or not. According to your own karmic predicament and what you want out of life. If you want a good worldly life for the most part your guru will al-

low you to have that, because you have to have a certain amount of those desires fulfilled before you grow out of them. It's not about pushing them away. It's about growing out of them. What a kid wants isn't the same as what an adult wants. What a mature adult wants isn't the same as what an immature adult wants. It's just a question of growing up and ripening. I've been at it for 40 years so I'm a little riper than I was.

WP: If you look back over the past decade, how have you ripened?

KD: I can tell by how much of me is in the chanting. How much of me is really there and how much is still trying to get there, and there's been a big shift. And that carries over into your daily life because the deeper you go, it allows you to release the stuff you've been hanging on to, because that's all you knew to do. Once you experience what it feels like to let go of some of that stuff then you naturally crave it, and without even thinking about it you begin to make different decisions in your everyday life. It just happens naturally because you tasted something that's entered into your system that's real. So you make choices that bring you closer to that.

WP: How close do you think you are to that now? What percent do you think you stay tethered to that place?

KD: Well I'm going to be really easy with myself and say one millionth of a millionth of a percent possibly on a good day.

WP: This brings me to ask you, exactly what is Kirtan (Chanting)?

KD: It's a purification practice. It cleans the mirror of the heart. When there is dust on the mirror and you look into the mirror and all you see is the dust or a shadow behind the dust, but as the dust is cleaned away you see yourself and that's what we are doing here. The most important thing is to just do it. Doing it when you feel good, doing it when you feel bad. When nothing is happening, doing it when everything is happening, because you have to train yourself to

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come to that place of attention because we are so fragmented growing up in this culture but when you see that beauty there is no option but to fall immediately in love, so when we see our own beauty we will fall completely in love.

WP: I personally discovered Kirtan after going through an extremely difficult time, and when I started chanting I was so concerned with how I sounded, if I was doing it correctly, being in-tune and all of that. Then I discovered your album “Door Of Faith”, and had a miraculous experience and it’s been different ever since. But this was about a year into my chanting until I felt it in my heart and the chants moving through me. I hear some people say the shift is almost instant for them. Do you find Kirtan traditionally works by shifting people more slowly or more quickly?

KD: Well a small pail gets filled up really quickly. A thimble gets filled up a lot quicker than a bucket. So most people are thimbles they get a little drop and they think they’re done. The real changes are off the radar you never know. Your stuff is floating away and you’re spending less and less time in heavier states of mind. You don’t notice that except if you look back and see, Wow! I use to be much crankier than am now.

WP: Sometimes when I chant it’s like tears just start flowing, like bubbling up from the well. And I think, “How it is possible we hold so much stuff inside that we are not aware of?”

KD: It’s not only that, it’s also as soon as the heart actually even turns towards love there’s nothing else it can do but cry. You just melt down because the love is so extraordinary, so real and unconditional. That all you can do is fall apart or fall together so to speak. Sometimes I can’t even sing now I cry so much. But it’s not sad crying, nor is it happy, it’s just like crying when you see something so beautiful you can’t bare it.

WP: Yeah, I’ve had a hard time trying to describe that crying. It almost defies our vocabulary.

KD: Yeah, it should. It’s like when a bird gets released from a cage. It’s like “Wow! I never thought this would happen!”

WP: Do you think Kirtan works because of the vibrations of chanting the holy names?

KD: Everything is vibration. Words are vibration. Computers are made out of molecules that vibrate. In the beginning there was the word, and the word

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The issue
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is a big issue,
but it's
not negative.”

was with God, and the word was towards God it was the first vibration that is creation. It multiplies and gets into everything. Because I’m a devotional personality the scientific ways don’t do anything for me. It’s the love you start to feel, the peace and the connecting with that space. That’s what keeps me going. Lubricates my heart, but it’s all vibration. What they say about Sanskrit, and with these mantras these names we chant in Kirtan, and what Maharaj-ji use to say, ” Go ahead sing your false line false Ram Ram, go ahead, one of these days you’ll sing it right ONCE and the real Ram will come!“ Because the “name” and what is “named” are not different than your “true

being” so when you start to pay attention to these names and enter to that flow of the “name” you begin to move deeply into yourself and of course it’s all vibration.

WP: What would you say to the skeptics or those who are afraid to take that first step to try Kirtan?

KD: It’s not my job to try to convince people, when they are suffering enough they will look for something to do. Until you are hungry for it you’re not going to do it. The more pain you have in your life the more you need to find a way to deal with it. That’s the first thing Buddha said when he came out of the jungle, “Suffering is everywhere in this existence there will always be suffering”. The issue of suffering is a big issue, but it’s not negative. It’s the only way and it’s liberating when you are no longer afraid of pain it changes the way in which you go through your day. You are more courageous, much more at ease and all those protections that were there you can take them down because you get a confidence of no matter what comes you can deal with it.

WP: So where do you think the music comes from?

KD: I think there are two things. There’s the impetus – the mantra, the inside. Then there’s this particular Western machine here (referring to self) that the first emotions were expressed through. And as you can tell by “Kirtan Wallah”, my new Cd, the space is the same but the music is very western and that comes out of my history. In my last album, “Heart As Wide As The World” (Grammy nominated), there was a song, “By Your Grace/Jai Gurudev,” where I woke in the middle of the night, sat down and played it and I sang it into my phone and went back to sleep and I didn’t even remember. When I woke up in the morning I knew something had happened and I went to listen to it. It doesn’t always happen like that.

WP: That is one of my favorite songs and albums of yours. Speaking of your Western history you were going to be a

rock singer, back in the day, why did you stop that track and choose Kirtan?

KD: I sing to save my life. I’m not singing for entertainment even my own entertainment. This is my practice. This is the rope that was thrown to me by my guru to save myself. He told me to “Sing”.

WP: If you had not met Maharaj-ji where do you think you would be?

KD: Dead!

WP: For sure?

KD: Absolutely, even after I met him I almost killed myself. I got into freebase cocaine and a deep, deep depression after I came back from India that first time. I had so much self-hatred, so much depression, so much anger, so much stuff going. I would be dead no question about it.

WP: Let’s talk about that self-hatred for a minute. Where do you think your self-hatred came from?

KD: My mother, my parents is where it came from. Of course, parents are the distributors of your Karma to some degree. You are born to certain Karmic connections of this life, not all of them happy. Your mother could have been someone you hurt very badly in another life. Who knows for sure? My mother loved me, there is no question, but she was not capable of expressing that. And she was also very damaged and angry. So she couldn’t help but take a lot of that out on me, and my father was very damaged in his own way so there wasn’t a lot he could do to help. So I grew up having been denied affection. In fact my father told me, that when I went from being a young baby to a little boy my mother stopped carrying me, holding me, kissing me. It all stopped. Now of course I have no memory of that, but can you imagine what I felt?

WP: You probably have a memory of it; it’s just deeper than your conscious. There is obviously a part of you that remembers that and it manifest in the self-

hatred and depression don’t you think?

KD: Yeah, I can’t tell you a conscious memory the day it happened or what it felt like but I can tell you the results of what it was, and that’s where all this depression and darkness came from.

WP: Do you feel you’ve cleared that? Or perhaps transformed it?

KD: No, I don’t. I feel like it impacts

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Unconditional
love is not
human. It's
from God,
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in you THAT's
not part of
your emotional
intelligence.”

my day a lot less than it used to, but I can still see a lot of programs running. There’s no question where it comes from and why. It’s still hard to get rid of those. You have to pay attention to them and try to see them. I believe it’s the strength that you get from doing the spiritual practice like chanting that allow you to finally transcend some of those programs. Some of those I might not transcend in this life.

WP: Do you ever set an intention before you chant or purposefully choose a specific mantra to help transcend something you’re struggling with?

KD: No, it’s the same thing every time I sit down, Ram Ram. Everything becomes background my knee, my bank account, my car, what I’m going to do later, until it slips into the foreground and I release it. Once you sit down to start chanting the deal you make with yourself is, you won’t go there. And when you find yourself there the only thing to do is let it go and to come back. That’s it. That’s why it works so well, because you can always let go no matter what you are stuck in. You can cultivate the ability through training and spiritual practice and you can always let go. There’s nothing you can’t let go of until you reach who you really are, and then it’s just your true being left. Doesn’t mean deny it, push it away or try to kill it. In terms of the mantra just means to release it and come back to the mantra, and in terms of your daily life if it’s a big heavy program let it be, give it space and let it be if you can’t push it away. The main thing is not judging yourself. Just see it! Then it doesn’t own you anymore. That’s how the practice translates to everyday.

WP: Kirtan being a part of the Bhakti Yoga path, the yoga of love and devotion, and you experience this unconditional love with Maharaj-ji. I wonder where in your external world do you experience unconditional love? Is it with your daughter or your grandson?

KD: Nowhere. None of that love is unconditional.

WP: Really, you don’t think?

KD: How is it unconditional? If it were you would love every child just the same, just as much as you love your own child. It’s conditional which is fine that’s what humans do. Unconditional love is not human. It’s from God, from that place in you that’s not part of your emotional intelligence. It’s our true nature and it’s not between people. It’s what people live in. It’s who you are. You can share it with people, but it’s not between people. God loves everyone exactly the same, and God lives in everyone exactly the same as their true self. When I was in

Continued from page 9

Auschwitz for the first time it was Autumn and the trees were all so amazing with their colors and such beautiful green grass and the sun would rise and I would look at the sun and I would say, "How dare you rise over this place, how dare you! How could you rise over this place?!" I was furious! I was completely flipped out for three or four days and then finally I got it... Oh, that's what the sun does. The sun shines on everything. It shines on good people, bad people, your kid, everybody else's kid, just the same. It's "us" with the conditioned emotions and conditioned affections wanting to get something for ourselves that makes it conditional. So real love is like the sun it's all the time everywhere, and it's equal to everybody.

WP: That's very enlightened and they say sudden enlightenment takes billions of births to prepare for. Can you tell me some of your births?

KD: It takes billions of births to manifest it for sure and make it happen. I don't know about any of that stuff. It's funny anybody I've ever talked to when I was younger, like psychics and all that stuff, they all say I was such a great person in past lives, but why wasn't I some asshole like everybody else? I don't believe that. It's just projections. I don't pay attention to that anymore. I'm so old now I can't even remember this birth.

WP: That's too funny. So let me ask it this way, The Whole Person Magazine is about becoming a Whole Person. Do you feel that you have become a Whole Person?

KD: No, not at all.

WP: Really? That's so not what I was expecting, why?

KD: I don't even know what that means, "to be a whole person". I still have all kinds of attitudes and judgments. A whole person would be a saint that has real love, that doesn't want anything for themselves, that isn't selfish, that isn't greedy, isn't guilty or ashamed or angry. That is a whole person. I don't know many of those.

WP: To me that would be a saint not a person. I definitely keep them in different categories.

KD: Well, that's a whole person. We are all so fragmented and judge ourselves. We can't help it. When you start to do these practices you see how much b.s. there is to deal with.

WP: Yeah, it's insane.

KD: It really is insane. We are insane! And the only sane ones are the "real" yogis and saints.

WP: Why do you think you have been blessed to share this gift with people?

KD: I have no idea, but it really is all my Gurus blessings. But really I'm like an old radio. He turns it on and he turns it off. But really what is a radio. It doesn't know anything about music it's just a transmitter. He transmits through me. He's blessed me. He transmitting something so beautiful people feel it, but it's not even a quality radio. It's not a high-fi radio it's an old broken down am radio with a little dial.

WP: Do you think Maharaj-ji knew there was something in YOU that would carry the message? That would take up the practice?

KD: Well, of course he knew exactly what was going on because he's doing it all. But I made him work. He had to save me so many times on the way to this moment in order for "this" to be happening.

WP: Can you tell me the last time he had to save you?

KD: Some of these things I can't even talk about.

WP: If it's too personal I understand.

KD: Let's just say that every cliff I saw I tried to jump off of it. And he just moved the cliff so I landed on solid ground but I didn't hurt anything. Back in 1995 in the temple, was the day that everything before it and everything after it, was all different. That was the day you could say, that I really met my Guru for the first time. And that day changed everything even though I had been with him in India for three years, twenty years before that (when he was still alive). That was the day I met Maharaj-ji's "Big Form" when he showed me a big part of himself. The day he put me on the stage. But he's pulling all the strings. If

you pull all the layers of appearance off and you finally see the truth you see that everything is kind of working perfectly by itself and even though you think you are doing things it only appears that way, because we are locked into this bandwidth. God is the doer.

WP: Do you feel that is when you begin to shift from singing Kirtan to embodying Kirtan?

KD: That is when it became a practice. It's very hard to put into words what I experienced. But I experienced there is no Krishna Das. It only looks like there is. All these thoughts are what make it look like there is. But behind that, there is nothing there but vast space and presence and love and peace and this little thickening of the atmosphere that is Krishna Das. And even if I'm stupid and I think I'm Krishna Das it doesn't change reality. I realized it wasn't about me and there is no me. But it was a very powerful experience and I was shown different levels of illusion. So I was able to come back and I was able to really sing, because it wasn't about me. It was just about me doing a practice. And other people can think and do what they want and that's what saved me.

WP: So what's the feeling you have now when you chant?

KD: Before 1995 the chanting was all emotional. I was using it to manipulate my emotions and feel Maharaj-ji's presence. It was all on the emotional level. When I came back it wasn't like that anymore, it was open. There wasn't any manipulation going on. Even for my own emotions. I just sing and whatever happens happens, and I get into it. And there's nothing holding me back. I'm not judging it, evaluating it, worrying about it and people experience what they experience. And that's all there is to it. I just do it as best I can and as clean as I can. I just do it!

WP: And I'm so grateful that you do it, as I know all of your fans are as well. Your life story is a real inspiration and this was a deep honor. Thank you so much KD.

KD: My pleasure it was fun talking with you. Ram Ram.

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COURSE IN MIRACLES DISCUSSION 9:15AM with Dr. Margie Ann Taylor-Black. 10:30 AM Sunday Service/Sunday School. Great Music! Love offering. Encino Community Church 7769 Topanga Canyon Blvd, Canoga Park 91304. 818/712-9400. <http://www.encinocommunitychurch.org>

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TUESDAY, AUGUST 5

SELF HELP SPIRITUAL DIVORCE OR BREAK-UP WEEKLY SUPPORT GROUP WITH TONY CAMACHO, C.Ht. 6:30-7:30PM. It is an empowering act to help yourself through a situation that at times seems unmanageable. This supportive meeting is an understanding environment that offers an important step in the recovery process. \$20. The GATEWAY 2511 S. Barrington Ave, Ste 100, West LA 90064. Free Parking. 310/479-0430. <http://www.thegatewayportal.com>

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WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 6

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