

# KRISHNA DAS — *reflecting*

BY DON CAMPBELL

*This phone interview took place on Friday, June 3, 2005. Krishna Das's latest albums are *Door of Faith* and the compilation album *Greatest Hits of the Kali Yuga*. He will be releasing a new album, *All One*, in August.*

**Don Campbell:** I noticed that in *Door of Faith* you seem to have slowed down your tempos a bit throughout the album and your singing seems a bit more heartfelt — if that's possible, since all of your albums have been heartfelt. A couple of my friends have also commented that they hear a note of something like sadness in your voice. How would you respond to that?

**Krishna Das:** Yeah, there is a deeper sense of longing. I don't think sadness is the right word.

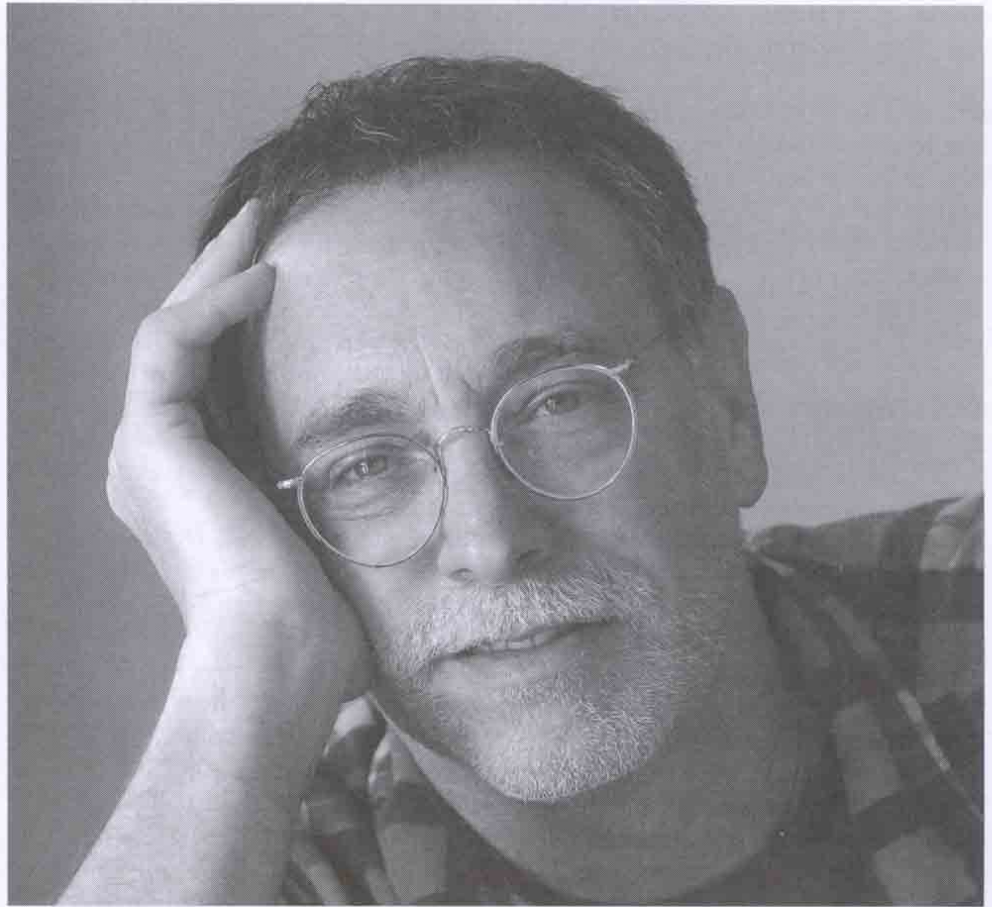
**DC:** Sadness has a negative connotation.

**KD:** It has a dead-end kind of connotation, whereas longing is actually a movement — a movement towards the thing that's longed for. It's like that Rumi poem called *Love Dogs*, in which he describes these dogs calling out, howling for their master. They're calling out for connection. Longing is actually how we human beings experience being pulled within by our own true selves. We experience that mentally, intellectually and emotionally as longing, but it's really the wind upon our faces as we're moving into a deeper place within us.

**DC:** What I'm wondering is whether you think this deeper sense of longing reflects an evolution in your own spiritual practice — your practice of kirtan?

**KD:** That's one way of putting it. I'm not sure I would have put it that way...I think that my guru [Neem Karoli Baba] is coming closer to me all the time, and the closer he gets the hotter it gets and the more longing I feel. The closer the moth gets to the flame the hotter it is. So, I feel that is the evolution you mentioned.

**DC:** I think our readers would also be



Krishna Das. Courtesy Photo

interested to know something about your own personal spiritual practice. Of course, we all know that you practice a lot of kirtan, but do you also practice japa?

**KD:** Yes. Singing it is one part of it. Silently repeating it is another part. Repeating it un-musically is another part, you know. It's not how you do it; it's what you're doing and why you're doing it.

**DC:** What about hatha yoga? Do you also practice that?

**KD:** I do some asanas, yes.

**DC:** For you, is there a connection that unites all those things?

**KD:** My life. That's all. My life is my path.

So, everything in it is a part of getting to that flame — removing the obstacles between me and that flame. All those things help.

**DC:** Speaking of things heating up, it seems — at least to an outsider like me — that your career is heating up. It seems like more people are becoming aware of you and I hope that's reflected in your CD sales.

**KD:** I don't know, it seems in terms of CD sales, things have been pretty even for quite awhile. Well, maybe a little more. But people are coming to sing here and there, and that's very gratifying.

**DC:** As demand increases, that means you're on the road more?

**KD:** I've been on the road pretty much constantly since 1997.

**DC:** How is that for you?

**KD:** It's a good practice. In many ways it's easier than being home.

**DC:** Really?

**KD:** Well, it's really simple: I sleep, I eat, I sing and then I sleep again. I sleep, I eat, I sing, I sleep again, then I travel. Then I do it again. So, it gets very streamlined and very simple. And when I'm home, there are so many things to take care of, you know: you've got to do the laundry and all the things you've got to do when you're home. And, of course, since I'm almost never home that long, it's always a very intense period. When I am home for awhile, it does tend to calm down a bit.

**DC:** A lot of people find being on the road very difficult — first, because traveling can be very exhausting.

**KD:** Well, the body finds it very difficult. Sure. So, I'm definitely trying to find a way to slow down. I think I'm going to pretty much keep this up until the middle of 2006. Then I'm going to have to find a way to change it. Hopefully, it'll become apparent how to do that.

**DC:** Is that being driven by just the tiring nature of the traveling or is something else calling out to you, to spend more time at home?

**KD:** No. It's the body. You know, I'm getting old.

**DC:** (chuckling) You and I are about the same age, so I understand.

**KD:** I'm 58 and, you know, I remember when I was a kid and my grandfather was 58 and he was a really old guy! (laughing)

**DC:** I know, at least it seemed to us when we were young that those folks who were in their 50s were ancient.

**KD:** I know, and now I'm 58 and it's like, "What the hell is this?"

**DC:** A lot of people also find being on the road difficult because of the disconnection, not only from loved ones who are at home, but also from a place — having no roots, no base.

**KD:** I'm happy if I'm near my harmonium. I don't have any particular attachment to any place other than India. My daughter is grown up now. So, even though she lives

near here, she's grown up and has her life. So, really, any one person that I miss — if there was one of those people, I'd have to drag her along, I guess. But, for me, when I travel it's very much like traveling to meet family. Everywhere I go it feels like family. Some of it, it's the kind of family you don't want to spend too much time with and others, it's really good family.

**DC:** (chuckling) Just like real family!

**KD:** So, it's great! It's really like meeting friends.

**DC:** And you do see an increase in the number of people coming to the kirtans?

**KD:** Yeah, it increases every year. It's been increasing a lot.

**DC:** We'd like to get your take on the practice of mantra, both in its sung form, as kirtan, and its spoken form, as japa. If someone is attracted to beginning a mantra practice, in whatever form, is there any advice you would give them.

**KD:** My practice isn't mantra. And my practice is not chanting. My practice is to remain, as much as possible, in the presence of my guru and in the presence of that love. Mantra, for me — namajapa, repetition of the Name — is one of the best ways I have of intensifying that presence.

**DC:** So, mantra is just a vehicle that carries you there?

**KD:** That's a dangerous word. First of all, there's a difference between mantra and what I do. Mantra can be any type of mantra. There are power mantras: there are mantras to stop trains, there are mantras to get money, there are mantras to heal people, there are mantras to make people sick. Mantras can be used for anything. They are formulas that are not essentially divine. They can be used for good or to hurt people, as well; it's a way of concentrating energy. What I do is slightly different. What I do is repetition of the Name, namajapa and namakirtan, and there's absolutely no negativity attached to the Name. You can't use the Name to hurt anybody. There are no bad results. They say that the Name and That Which Is Named are not different. So, when we're chanting the Name, if we have eyes to see, we would feel and see and be in and aware of the presence of God. The only problem is all this stuff between who we think we are and our own true being. So, the Name is at once

a practice and a manifestation of what it means. There is a quote from St. John of the Cross that says, "In the beginning, the Father uttered one Word. That Word is His Son and He utters Him forever in everlasting silence. And it is in silence that the heart must hear."

**DC:** That's beautiful.

**KD:** So, what we're doing here is: our only intention, in the repetition of the Name, is to realize God and to become one with that love. We have no personal agenda other than that. When you do mantras, mantras can be done for anything. Anything done with a motive, a selfish motive, creates karma — even good things, helpful things, done with a selfish motive, like people who are professional "do-gooders." That's not selfless service: their egos are getting strengthened, their sense of separateness is increasing, because they think they're doing something — what they do has a sense of selfishness involved in it. The very practice of the Name destroys selfishness. The very practice of repeating the Name ultimately leads to the dissolution of that separate self, that illusory self, that impermanent self. And these Names are revealed Names, they were given to us by beings who had accomplished or carried that awareness within them of that One of which we are all a part. And that's how these Names came into this world. We didn't make these up. These are revealed to us from within and given to us by the saints. And so, by repeating them, we are turning ourselves within to that place that they come from.

**DC:** So, if someone is attracted to being this practice, how would you suggest they begin?

**KD:** First, they should figure out what it is they want to do. And then they should just do it. You don't have to dress up, you don't have to take a bath before you practice, you don't have to light candles or incense, you don't have to have pictures up — you don't have to do anything. All you have to do is have the right motivation. The underlying motivation is to become free of suffering, to relieve our pain and to move towards that Love that includes all beings within It. Of course, when we start a practice it is very selfish: We're thinking about ourselves. We're thinking about what we want to get from this practice. So, that's the way it appears to us at the time, but the more we

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