

Deva Premal - this interview was published in Dutch for BewustZijn Magazine in The Netherlands.

Deva Premal (Germany, 1970) and her husband Miten (Great Britain, 1946) are possibly the most famous mantra singers in the world. What is more: thanks to them, many Westerners know and can sing the lyrics to mantras that are thousands of years old. Walk into any yoga class and chances are that you will hear their music playing in the background. Every year they visit Almere to give two concerts.

To interview Deva Premal and Miten had been on my bucket list for a few years. Last year it did not work out because of their tight travel schedule, but this year I am to receive a warm welcome. On the morning of their concert I park my car at their hotel and step into the lift. To find myself face to face with two beautiful people. I stare at them and realise that they are Deva and Miten. "Erm", I stammer, "I'm here to see you!". Straight away Miten gives me a big hug, and Deva follows his lead. It turns out that two interviews have been planned at the same time. "No problem", I say to myself, and decide to speak to Deva alone. During our conversation, something strange happens. I am silent. I look into her clear blue eyes and have the feeling that all my questions are unnecessary. I could just sit there, next to her, in silence. What a special woman. Luckily I am able to squeeze out a few questions and she starts to tell me her story.

Osho

"Miten and I met each other twenty-four years ago in Osho's ashram in Pune, India, where I would end up living for two years. I was twenty years old and enjoyed being there. Miten worked there as the music programme coordinator. It was his job to organise music nights for the two thousand inhabitants and visitors of the ashram. I admired his music, which supported and carried the meditations as well as the silence. It was not entertainment, but it served to let people turn inward. What was special, was that the people that came to meditate would sit with their backs to the musicians. Those would be in the back of the room and the people would look to the front, at Osho. In the beginning Osho would be there in person and after he died, there was a picture of him."

Awake

"Miten had always been making music. As a musician he travelled the world and had a supporting role in well-known bands like Fleetwood Mac and Ry Cooder's band. He played Wembley Stadium, but nobody came specifically for him. To set his ego aside like that was a good preparation for his time with Osho, I think. He never became a famous musician and he was never really satisfied with what he was doing. When he read one of Osho's books it was a real revelation to him. He discovered that there is an alternative way of living. The book was called 'No Water, No Moon' and the story to awaken him was about a nun, Chiyono, who has studied all her life but has never reached enlightenment. One day, she walks to the well with a bucket of water. She looks at the reflection of the moon in the water in the bucket. All of a sudden, the bottom drops out of the bucket, the water spills out and the reflection is gone. At that moment, Chiyono realises that she has been admiring a reflection while she could have been watching the real moon. Then she turns her gaze at the moon and reaches enlightenment."

Key

“Miten immediately realised the parallel with the music he was making at the time. The music was like a key that he was polishing. He got obsessed with the key and started to worship it, instead of using it to open the door. He left his manager and his music career, sold all his guitars and went to live with Osho. There he lived a simple life, working in the kitchen, without anybody knowing that he was a musician. Music played an important role in the ashram, in daily life as well as during meditations. At a certain point he told others that he was able to play the guitar and some percussion, and he started to play again. He then found out how immensely satisfying it was to sing simple love songs to Osho. Before, he would fret over songs, if they could become a hit or not, if the song was intelligent enough. But now, he felt complete by singing a song with “I love you” as its only lyrics.”

Inner journey

“I arrived in the ashram as a body work therapist. I wanted to do healing work. Nowadays, I heal through my music, but then I still thought I would be working with the body. I gave massages, shiatsu treatments, reflexology treatments. When I met Miten, one of the first things I said was that I would like to sing with him. Well actually I did like singing, but that was not what it was about. I just wanted to be near him. After a while, our singing became more of a ‘thing’. That was many years ago, but we are still doing what we did then: we make music that people can use on their journey inward. The big difference is that we no longer stand in the back of the room and we now face our audience. What has remained the same is that Osho is always there.”

Freedom

“For the first seven years we did not sing mantras. We sang Miten’s songs and those of the ashram. Osho was not a traditional teacher; he encouraged us to find our own paths, to express what was inside us and needed to come out. He did not lean on old scriptures and in his meditations there were no mantras. He was about removing all emotional baggage, so that we could live by our own choices and qualities. He would never say: “If you do this or that, you will become enlightened. This is the path; this is the way.” Instead, he taught us that freedom is the highest aim. Everyone carries a responsibility to find their own path. That is a challenge: you have to do it by yourself. He would occasionally speak very positively about mantras, but he did not tell us that we would get anywhere by chanting these mantras. He wanted to remove all such concepts and ideas. Originally, Osho was a Jain (Jainism is an ancient Indian religion – Ed.) and there was one mantra from that tradition he especially liked. Up to now, Miten has not recorded it. Apparently, the time is not ripe yet.”

Gayatri

“After we had been travelling around for seven years, making music, I heard the Gayatri mantra somewhere. I knew it well because my father would sing it to me every night as a child. It touched me deeply. Like when I was a child, I starting singing mantras again. Everything transformed. My voice changed and I became less shy. Until then, I had not dared sing for others. I was like a flower coming into bloom. When I was twenty-eight, we brought out a CD called ‘The Essence’ that had the Gayatri mantra on it. We were really surprised by how well it was received. We had made the album for our own circle of family and friends. We had only a thousand CDs produced and had expected to be able to sell and give away these during the rest of our lives. By now, around three-hundred thousand copies have been sold. To me it is so special how this came into existence! That I heard the Gayatri mantra again, in the right time, in the right place. It is the most important mantra there is and now so many people know its lyrics off by heart.”

Mantra

“Singing mantras is so powerful and special. The sound and the vibration of the words work like medicine. Every tone has a different effect. It focuses on a certain body part or life quality. A mantra can be healing, it can remove blockages, or unite male and female energies. Or enhance feelings of peace or love. There are so many mantras, so many effects. The sound of a mantra unites us, it is universal. We sing mantras from old scriptures and English songs that Miten writes. Osho is always the inspiration. Both the mantras and Miten’s songs create a certain silence, a stillness. When you listen to them, you do not want to applaud. Our audience senses that and that is why it is always silent in between our songs. A complete, loving silence.”

At home

“On stage we feel so blessed. Even after twenty-four years this feeling still keeps growing. Because our audience brings so much love to our concerts, the ambiance is intimate, almost like being at home, even in very large concert halls. Every time we experience a feeling of reunion. And we are so grateful for that. We tour a lot and it does not tire us. After all, we are not forced to go on tour, we do it by our own choice. It is not a mission, we do it because we love what we do. Three months per year we live in Australia, we always spend two weeks in Corfu and we spend one month in Costa Rica for our tantra and mantra holidays. The rest of the time we travel. We are at home wherever we are, even though I do not think we could keep up with this life if we did not have each other. We strengthen and complete each other. We encourage and challenge each other. One of Miten’s love songs is about that. We keep each other balanced. “

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Gayatri mantra

Gayatri Mantra Ohm Bhur Bhuvah Svah Tat Saviturvarenyam Bhargodevasya Dhimahi Dhi-yo-yo-nah
Prachodayat

We meditate on the glory of the Creator;
Who has created the Universe;
Who is worthy of Worship;
Who is the embodiment of Knowledge and Light;
Who is the remover of Sin and Ignorance;
May He open our hearts and enlighten our Intellect.

Source: <http://magicofgayatri.com/pages/magic-of-gayatri.html>