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# RELIGIOUS MUSIC OF ASIA

THE NEAR EAST/INDIA/EAST ASIA

RECORDED AND EDITED BY CHARLES A. KENNEDY





SIDE I THE NEAR EAST AND INDIA

- Band 1. THE HOLY QURAN, SURAH 1 (.36)
- Band 2. CALL TO PRAYER (2.19)
- Band 3. QURANIC CHANTING BEFORE PRAYER SERVICE (2.25)
- Band 4. HINDU WEDDING CHANTING (2.08)
- Band 5. SONG TO KALI (1.36)
- Band 6. JAIN PUJA (7.39)
- Band 7. ADI GRANTH RECITATION (2.45)
- Band 8. NEPALESE MONKS (2.42)

SIDE II EAST ASIA

- Band 1. CHINESE BUDDHIST PRIEST CHANTING (1.30)
- Band 2. CHINESE BUDDHIST NUNS CHANTING (2.08)
- Band 3. BAND PLAYING FOR WEZAK (1.47)
- Band 4. ZEN MONASTERY, MORNING SERVICE (5.24)
- Band 5. HYMN TO DHYANA (2.40)
- Band 6. ZEN MONASTERY DRUM CALL (5.15)
- Band 7. SHINTO PROCESSIONAL (1.50)
- Band 8. SHINTO CONGREGATIONAL CHANT (1.54)

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BY CHARLES A. KENNEDY

COVER PHOTOGRAPH  
OF SHOKOKUJI TEMPLE, KYOTO, JAPAN,  
BY CHARLES A. KENNEDY

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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# RELIGIOUS MUSIC OF ASIA

Notes by Charles A. Kennedy

The selections on this record are a sampler of the musical traditions of the major religions of Asia. Recorded on location in the middle of cities or in rural monasteries, they reflect, in sound, the actual conditions of life, not the controlled acoustics of a studio. Wedding guests in South India do not sit in reverential silence as the priests recite from the Vedas; car horns punctuate the quiet atmosphere of the mosque; Buddha's Birthday is celebrated to the accompaniment of an American-style brass band in central Taiwan.

There can be no mistaking in any of these instances the vitality of these religions. Conditioned to approach Asian religions as examples of the historical development of the religious consciousness of man or as exotic philosophies, we often miss the vital spirit that converts the philosophical structure of the faith into a living experience. Listening to a blind boy sing of his devotion to Kali in Calcutta or to a crowd of over four hundred chant their affirmation of faith in Konkokyo Shinto in Osaka, we can imagine and hopefully appreciate some of that vitality.

SIDE 1: The Near East and India

Band 1: The Holy Quran, Surah 1

One of the striking features of Islam is the absence of instrumental or polyphonic music in the mosque. In contrast both to the Jewish and Oriental Christian usages of liturgical music, Islam has contented itself with the chanting of the Quranic text. A partial explanation for this may be found in the absence

of a hierarchical institution, a priesthood charged with the establishment and embellishment of liturgical services at a given sanctuary. The Arabic language as the medium of the revelation of God to the Prophet became not only the base for the chant but a determining factor in its development. The meter of the language coupled with the inimitable style of the Quran itself produces a rhythmic line that requires only a tonal setting to become a chant. In practice the form of the chant is determined by the length of the vowels: short vowels must be sung quickly, long vowels may be embellished and prolonged.

Surah 1, "The Opening", is sometimes popularly called "the Lord's Prayer of Islam". It is recited each time a Muslim prays. A comparison of the style of this recitation with the chanting on Band 3 illustrates how the meter of the language evokes and determines the chant.



Egypt-Cairo, Hussein

photo by C.A. Kennedy



## The Text:

### Surah 1

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.  
Praise belongs to God, the Lord of all  
Being,  
the All-merciful, the All-compassionate,  
the Master of the Day of Doom.  
Thee only we serve; to Thee alone we pray  
for succour.  
Guide us in the straight path,  
the path of those whom Thou hast blessed,  
not of those against whom thou art wrathful,  
nor of those who are astray.

(Arberry translation)

## Band 2: Call to Prayer

In Muslim communities around the world the Call to Prayer is sounded by a muezzin five times daily. He chants from the minaret, the fore-court of the mosque, or, where the electronic age has intruded, over the public address system. His text is at once a summons and an affirmation of faith.

The opening phrase of the Call to Prayer demonstrates the manner in which embellishments may be incorporated into the chant. The Arabic reads, "Allahu akbar". Only the second vowel in "Allah" is long, so only that sound in the entire phrase may be extended. Depending on the particular school of chanting, the extension of the vowels can result in coloratura cadenzas.

The only variation in the text occurs in the morning, when an additional line is inserted, viz., "to pray is better than slumber".

## The Text:

### Call to Prayer

God is Great (est)  
God is Great  
God is Great  
I testify that there is no God but God  
and Muhammad is His Prophet.  
Come to prayer  
Come to Prosperity  
God is Great  
God is Great  
There is no God but God.

## Band 3: Quranic Chanting Before Prayer Service

The chanting of the Quran serves many functions in Islamic worship. One may go to the mosque at any time of the day and see a worshipper sitting on the floor chanting the surahs to himself or for a small group of men seated near him. Elsewhere in the same mosque another may be chanting some other passage from memory or from copies of the Quran kept available. For special family festivals a Quranic chanter may be called into the home to provide a spiritual framework for the occasion. In many Muslim lands now the loudspeaker systems insure the entire neighborhood will participate in the event. After the Call to Prayer and before the Prayer Service begins in the mosque, selections from the Quran are chanted as a sort of prelude for the service. This selection was recorded at such a time.

## Band 4: Hindu Wedding Chanting

This extremely brief excerpt comes from a traditional wedding service that takes the better part of a day to complete. The wedding party is seated in a small rectangular area either in a temple or in a tent in the temple yard. A sacred fire is kindled and a representation of a tree is erected. The prescribed ritual is conducted by two or more priests chanting consecutively. The texts are from the Vedas and recited in Sanskrit or an approximation of Sanskrit, depending on the training of the priest. His rote learning does not



India-Bangalore, Hindu Wedding

photo by C.A. Kennedy

necessarily include comprehension of the texts, but at least this places him on an equal footing with the participants. The guests sit on three sides of the nuptial party and freely converse and come and go as the service drones on. Off to one side a small band plays selections that punctuate the ritual, but for the most part this music remains unrelated to the chanting. Certainly it is not an accompaniment for the ritual; rather it offers a garish counterpoint to the chant.



## Band 5: Song to Kali

In addition to the ancient hymns of the Vedas and the philosophies of the Upanishads, there is the largest body of devotional literature in the bhakti cults. These cults are the most popular form of Hinduism. Krishna and Rama, incarnations of the great Vishnu, Shiva and his female counterpart Kali are the most widely worshipped. Unlike the esoteric Way of Knowledge (Jnana) or the pedestrian Way of Works (Karma), the Way of Devotion (Bhakti) is intensely personal, demanding that the worshipper place his hope for salvation in the power of the chosen deity.

The city of Calcutta is named after the goddess Kali, the awful (and awful) gory goddess who, like Shiva, destroys in order to bring new life. Her temple, the Kali Ghat, is one of the most famous in India. Goats are ceremonially slaughtered there daily and the runnels in the stone courtyard are permanently stained from the flow of blood. In sharp contrast to the ritual sacrifices and the representations of Kali with her necklace of skulls and belt of severed human limbs, the hymns to Kali are full of evocations of tenderness and grace. This recording is of a blind boy who sat in the courtyard singing for his livelihood. The text is in Bengali, the language of Calcutta.

## Band 6: Jain Puja

Like some other facets of Jainism, a worship service seems to be a contradiction in terms. Jainism was once caricatured as "teaching atheism, worshipping man and nourishing vermin", a description with just enough truth in it to be a kind of heresy. It is true that the Jains do not recognize a Supreme Being and that they respect and venerate those men of earlier ages who successfully conquered their karma and thus became Jinas. As there is no priesthood in Jainism, Hindu Brahmins are called upon to perform rituals when needed. An interesting demonstration of the difference between Hindu and Jain puja worship) can be seen by comparing this selection with the preceding. Here the spoken word is gone; there is no One to address and no word of revelation to repeat. There is only the act itself, the beating of the drums and the ringing of the bell, with a blast from the conch shell at the beginning and end.

## Band 7: Adi Granth Recitation

Sikhism emerged in the sixteenth century as a conscious attempt to reconcile Hinduism in its later bhakti forms with Islam. Its homeland is the Punjab where the first and strongest impact of Islam was felt as the invaders came in from

the north and west. The Sikh house of worship is reminiscent of a mosque: simplicity of form and decoration are the rule. Shoes are removed before entering. The center of the devotional life and public worship is the recitation of the sacred text, the Adi Granth. At the central shrine of Sikhism, the Golden Temple of Amritsar, readers recite it day and night without interruption, the new man taking up the place and tempo of his predecessor. In the Temple itself a group of three or four musicians provide an instrumental background for the recitation. The text of the Adi Granth is a compilation of poems and hymns of the ten gurus or leaders of the Sikhs.

## Band 8: Nepalese Buddhist Monks

The first reaction to this selection is often a concern that something has gone wrong with the phonograph. The growling sounds, the intermittent drumbeat, the blast of the mountain horns all combine to give a good imitation of a troubled turntable. Buddhist liturgical music has its origins in the Hindu chants and as Buddhism spread from India the monks introduced Indian forms of sacred music throughout East and Southeast Asia. By the eighth century, A. D., Indian musical styles were replacing the ancient forms of Japan. But just as the sacred texts were transliterated and translated into the different languages of Asia, so the music was modified and adapted to suit the needs of each culture. The elementary instruments of the Nepalese cannot produce the nuances of sound which the Japanese flute can. Certain rhythmic and vocal continuities are distinguishable, however. The accelerating drumbeat which intensifies the worship experience is the most obvious to western ears. The custom of beginning chants from a kind of growl and ending on a falling tone again reminds one of a malfunctioning turntable, and since for the most part each priest sings in the key best suited for himself, the effect of a group intoning together is quite unharmonious.

## SIDE 2: East Asia

### Band 1: Chinese Buddhist Priest Chanting

At the beginning of this century it was possible to say that any elements of homogeneity amidst the diverse cultures of East Asia could be traced to Buddhism. The spread of western technology has changed this, but only superficially. The flamboyantly decorated temples of Bangkok have more similarities than differences with the austere structures of Japan. In their liturgical traditions this is even more apparent. A common source of cantillation influences all the variations heard in Buddhist services from India to



Japan: there is the same hypnotic drone, the flagrant disregard of pitch and the absence of instrumental accompaniment. A device similar to the drummer's hollow block is often used to establish the tempo. Called a "fish-block" for reasons not completely understood, it is a rounded wooden device (usually painted red with black and gold trim in China, often unpainted in Japan) struck with a short stick. The block can vary in size from about five inches to over fourteen inches in width.

The priest chants from the Sutras or recites hymns or prayers to the Buddha. These recitations may be given as part of stated services or at the special request of a worshipper as a meritorious act. The recording was made in Taichung, Taiwan, during the period of celebration of Buddha's birthday.

#### Band 2: Chinese Buddhist Nuns Chanting

Bells are used to punctuate the chanting of Sutras and other sacred texts. There are two general types in the Buddhist temples of China and Japan. The bowl-shaped bell sits on a circular cushion and is struck with a short stick. It usually produces a low tone. The hand bell consists of a small brass hemisphere mounted on the end of a long doweled handle with a separate thin brass striker fastened to the handle by a short chain. This bell is held in one hand, the handle grasped by the lower fingers while the striker is manipulated by the upper.

The circumstances surrounding this recording are an indication of the way in which Buddhism has been adapted by the cultures it sought to missionize. A family was celebrating the Chinese festival for the ancestors, which includes cleaning and decorating the graves of the fathers. As Buddhists they came to the temple with offerings of paper "spirit money" and incense sticks and requested that the nuns offer a service on behalf of themselves and their family. The nuns, in their grey robes and with heads shaved like the monks, formed a chorus with the solo voice answered by the rest in a refrain that included bells and drum accompaniment.

#### Band 3: Band Playing for Wezak

Wezak is the festival commemorating the birth of Buddha. Traditions vary as to the exact date in much the same way as they do concerning Christmas. In Taiwan April 8 is the date, and it is marked by parades and festivities as well as services in the temples. Trucks, bicycles and rickshas are gaily decorated; social organizations

march as units or sponsor floats; children march in costume; religious orders appear in their vestments. The electronic sound track and the portable public address systems are also in evidence.



Taiwan-Taichung, Village Temple

photo by C.A. Kennedy

The music is still Chinese, but changes are taking place. One of the parade units was an American style brass band complete with uniforms that were directly taken from "High School, U. S. A. " The full range of brass and woodwinds were present and, although the tune was Chinese, extra notes (especially little trumpet fanfares) were finding their way into the performance, a suggestion of things to come in this area of East-West interaction.

#### Band 4: Zen Monastery, Morning Service

This selection may come as a surprise to those accustomed to think of Zen Buddhism as an esoteric philosophy concerned with contemplation leading to intuitive insight or enlightenment. About twice a month the monks gather for a communal service featuring chanting, prayer and a discourse by the abbot. Certain religious festivals are marked by special services held in the main shrine as the monastery.

In the Shokokuji Monastery, Kyoto, the Reverend Mr. Ogata conducts a devotional service each morning for the benefit of the guests at his Zen Study Center. He has translated the liturgy into English and leads the reading himself. His sons assist with the chanting in Japanese as a prelude to the liturgy. The chapel room in the Center has a shrine alcove along the inside wall. In good weather the outside wall of wood and glass panels can be opened to give a view of one of the gardens. The participants sit in rows facing the center of the room with the shrine at one side and the garden at the other. The leader sits facing the shrine with his back to the garden. After the reading of the liturgy Hakuin's Hymn to Meditation (Dhyana) is read in unison, followed by a period of directed meditation using readings or recordings of Japanese music.





Taiwan-Chang Hua, Bai Bai Festival

photo by C.A. Kennedy

### Band 5: Hymn to Dhyana

Zen Buddhism is not a philosophy for the monks alone, nor is it primarily meant for those who follow the contemplative life. Its teachings are as relative to archery and fencing as they are to the Tea Ceremony. One indication of its continuing vitality is to be seen in the group of university students in Kyoto who meet each week to practice zazen in a meditation hall near Doshisha University. About twenty-five students, some still in their university uniforms, sit in the prescribed form (legs crossed in the lotus position, hands lying palms upwards with thumb tips touching in the lap, eyes not completely closed, back erect). One of the senior members walks silently in front of the facing rows with a heavy stick used to correct posture or to relieve aching muscles of the students. The students sit for about twenty-five minutes, then rise and walk briskly around the hall ten times or so, then resume their seats for another twenty-five minutes. At the conclusion of their evening session they recite Hakuin's Hymn to Meditation (Dhyana) and then after a final act of homage to the enshrined Buddhas on the altar, silently leave the hall.

#### The Text:

#### Hakuin's Song Of Practicing Dhyana

All things are primarily Buddhas.  
It is like water and ice:  
There is no ice apart from water;  
There are no Buddhas apart from beings.

Not knowing how close the truth is to them,  
Beings seek for it afar--what a pity!  
They are like those who, being in the midst of  
water,  
Cry out for water, feeling thirst.

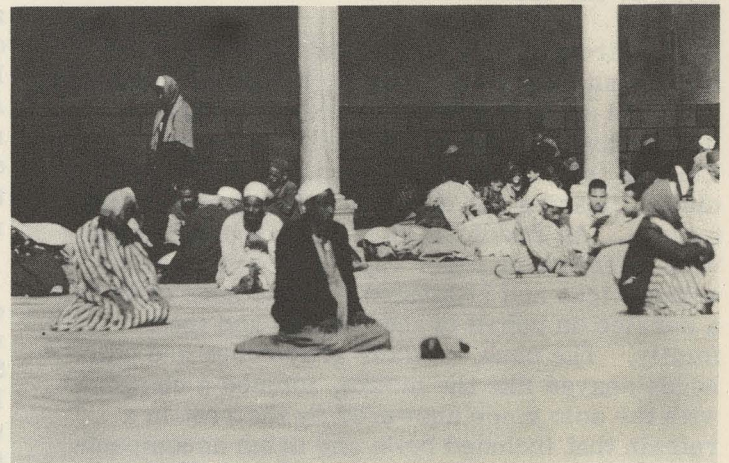
They are like the son of the rich man,  
Who, wandering away from his father,  
Goes astray amongst the poor.  
It is all due to their ignorance  
That Beings transmigrate in the darkness.

Of the Six Paths of existence.  
When they wander from darkness to darkness,  
How can they ever be free from birth-and-  
death?

As for the Dhyana practice as taught in the  
Mahayana,  
No amount of praise can exhaust its merits.  
The Six Paramitas--beginning with the Giving,  
Observing the Precepts,  
And other good deeds, variously enumerated,  
Such as Nembutsu, Repentance, Moral  
Training, and so on

All are finally reducible to the practice of  
Dhyana.  
The merit of Dhyana practice, even during  
a single sitting,  
Erases the countless sins accumulated in the  
past.  
Where then are the Evil Paths to misguide us?  
The Pure Land cannot be far away.

Those who, for once, listening to the Dharma  
In all humility;  
Praise it and faithfully follow it,  
Will be endowed with innumerable merits.



Egypt-Cairo, Azhar

photo by C.A. Kennedy

But how much more so when you turn your eyes  
within yourselves  
And have a glimpse into your self-nature!  
You find that the self-nature is no-nature--  
The truth permitting no idle sophistry.  
For you, then, opens the gate leading to the  
oneness of cause and effect;  
Before you, lies a straight road of non-duality  
and non-trinity.



When you understand that form is the form of  
the formless,  
Your coming-and-going takes place nowhere  
else but where you are;  
When you understand that thought is the thought  
of the thoughtless,  
Your singing-and-dancing is no other than the  
voice of the Dharma.  
How boundless is the sky of samadhi!  
How refreshingly bright is the moon of the  
Fourfold Wisdom.  
Being so, is there anything you lack?  
As the Absolute presents itself before you,  
The place where you stand is the Land of Lotus,  
And your person, the body of the Buddha.

#### Band 6: Zen Monastery Drum Call

Whenever the monks are to be called together for a service, a distinctive tattoo is beat on the large drum in the chapel room. The drum is barrel-shaped and mounted on its side so that the head is vertical. The drumhead is fastened with nail studs around the rim. After a series of beats on the drumhead, the two drumsticks are run around the rim producing a series of sharp staccato sounds as the sticks strike the nail heads. The accelerating beat and change of rhythm on the drum with its low tones contrast with the metallic clicks from these rim runs. The entire drum tattoo may be repeated as a processional for the monks as they take their positions before the shrine.

#### Band 7: Shinto Processional

The conservatism of the tradition and the particular development of Shinto have tended to preserve the ancient Japanese musical tradition, although even here musicologists recognize in the forms adaptations of imports from the Chinese court during the Middle Ages. With the disestablishment of state Shinto in 1945 a recrudescence of sectarian Shinto has taken place showing great popular appeal. These sectarian groups, like others in Asia, have borrowed heavily from the techniques of the Protestant missionary, referring to themselves as churches, their leaders as reverends or bishops, and organizing Sunday Schools, men's clubs and Boy Scout troops.

Some of these sects in Japan present a curious amalgam of the ancient Japanese with the Gospel hymn, another direct borrowing from the missionary. In this selection only the former is heard as the processional to a thanksgiving service at the Konkokyo Church of Izu, Osaka.

#### Band 8: Shinto Congregational Chant

Nowhere is the vitality of sectarian Shinto more evident than in this congregational chant in which they affirm their faith in the tenets of Konkokyo. The chant lasted for just over ten minutes. In the faces of the people one could see the intensity of their effort and the depth of their passion.



Japan-Osaka, Shinto Priest

photo by C.A. Kennedy