



A MODERN  
QUEST

FOR ETERNAL  
TRUTH

Sharon Kumuda Janis

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Reviews for the first edition of

**A MODERN QUEST FOR ETERNAL TRUTH**

In a larger sense, this memoir is a dialogue between Indian spirituality and Western psychology. The question that Janis answers is: "Can a westerner come to know Indian spirituality and flourish in its depths, even when it is alien to western ways of knowing?" She answers with a resounding "yes."

—*Publishers Weekly*

Inspired by deep guidance and inner listening, this book aims to bring readers to "a sense of wonder and respect for their own journey" and a greater regard for others on their paths.

—*NAPRA ReVIEW*

A beautiful and poignant spiritual odyssey that is equally provocative and touching, informative and enlightening, humorous and heartbreaking.

—**Joseph Chilton Pearce**

It is a book that is very difficult to put down—the kind that keeps you up at night beyond your bedtime.

—**21st Century Books**

It's a good story, and for those of us who are interested in what exactly goes on in those ashrams, it's hard to put down... Few writers so far have told the tale of what it is like to live and study, heart and soul, with the likes of Muktananda.

—*RALPH: Review of the  
Arts, Literature, Philosophy and the Humanities*

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By the author of *Spirituality For Dummies*  
and *Secrets of Spiritual Happiness*

Sharon Kumuda Janis

Night Lotus Books  
[www.nightlotus.com](http://www.nightlotus.com)

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Cover and text design: Sharon Janis

The names of certain people appearing in this book have been changed where deemed appropriate.

ISBN-13: 978-0-9785568-8-4

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## Publisher's Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Janis, Sharon, 1959-

A Modern Quest For Eternal Truth

Sharon Janis.

p. cm.

ISBN: 978-0-9785568-8-4

1. Janis, Sharon, 1959- . 2. Spiritual biography-

United States. I. Title

BL73.J37A3 2010.

291.4'092—dc21

[B]

CIP

For You



# A Modern Quest For Eternal Truth

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## PROLOGUE

IT STARTED AS A LOW RUMBLING. I had barely sunk into the arms of sleep after a late night editing session for the animated television show “X-Men,” when the world went mad. The earth, metaphor for all that is stable and dependable, was dancing. But this was not a gentle dance; it was *Shiva*, dancing a dance of destruction. This was a display of physical force unlike anything I had witnessed before.

Instinctively, I jumped up and ran to the alcove I had designated as the “earthquake spot” just days earlier, when two small shocks had rumbled through town. During my five years in Los Angeles, we’d had a few small temblors. Most had occurred during my workdays at various television studios, where I’d usually joke about the shaking walls and occasionally impressed co-workers with my bravado. Those small tremors were nothing like this.

I was also working double duty as film editor for the kid’s show, “Mighty Morphin’ Power Rangers,” and in my groggy state, with my apartment shaking violently from side to side, I visualized one of the Power Ranger uber-monsters picking up our building and shaking it back and forth. I wondered for a moment if I might be dreaming — but dream or no dream, I had to pay attention to the present moment while holding tightly to the doorframe to keep from being tossed around.

As sounds of destruction played around me, a glass shower door in the apartment upstairs shattered, and my neighbor’s 35” TV smashed against the wall.

In my mind’s eye, I envisioned a jagged line running up the coast. This shaking might only be the edge of something much bigger, perhaps with the entire west coast crumbling at its seams, swallowing thousands of lives with each quaking gulp.

## *A MODERN QUEST FOR ETERNAL TRUTH*

I wondered if this was the “Big One” we would use back in Michigan as an excuse to never even *consider* moving to California. Regardless, if not “THE” big one, this was certainly “A” big one, and I was possibly about to die.

The large water heaters on the floor above could crash through my ceiling at any moment. The entire building could collapse, squashing my body like a bug. These could be my final moments as me.

“Now what am I supposed to do? I should know this!”

I thought I had made peace with the idea of death many years earlier, during a decade of deeply spiritual, monastic-style ashram life. Yet now, with the walls closing in on my existence in this world, my pounding heart cried out with dejection at the large gap between where I was and where I'd hoped to be during my last moments of life.

Within the expanded time frame of full-attentiveness, I looked back. Once upon a time, drenched in the ashram's spiritual teachings and editing hundreds of videos for my guru's work, I had anticipated that my death would come as a great merging into the Grand Source of all, as promised in one of my favorite Indian texts, *The Bhagavad Gita*, where Krishna tells his disciple Arjuna: “Whatever state of being a soul remembers at the moment of death, he goes to that very state of being. Therefore, at all times meditate on Me (the Supreme Soul); keep your mind and intelligence fixed on Me. In this way, thou shalt surely come to Me.”

Now it was too late. The angel of death was tapping his toe right before me, and I had been wasting my precious time on TV shows and Hollywood minutiae instead of preparing for my inevitable time of ascension from this world.

*A century's worth of work for one chance to surrender.*

— *JALALLUDIN RUMI*

Why couldn't this most important threshold have come when I was beyond personal identification, living a life completely devoted to God, when I was listening to divine teachings, chanting holy mantras and serving our spiritual community selflessly? Why couldn't this time have come when I was filled with the powerful Shakti energy, supported by a spiritual community and the tangible inner and outer experience of grace?

## *Prologue*

Had my death come then, I would have surely leapt over this threshold into a far greater level of evolutionary existence. Why did it have to come now, when I was just like everyone else, absorbed in ephemeral things that, according to some spiritual philosophies, don't even exist?

Greater than my fear of death was a sense of embarrassment at having wasted the precious gifts of spiritual wisdom I'd received and experienced throughout those years. With the walls shaking around me, I cowered before my God, but couldn't readily find that holy presence.

First, I tried to place a familiar face on the looming immensity of Universal God, invoking the images and remembrance of my spiritual masters. Then I repeated a Sanskrit mantra as the shaking continued, in hopes that the holy syllables would magically lift me up. I wasn't even praying as much to survive the quake as I was to be in the right state of consciousness. If these were meant to be my last moments in this world, I wanted to leave from a mountaintop of elevated awareness, instead of from the valley in which I had been dwelling. But how could I make the leap? Was it even possible to break through untold layers of illusion in these last few moments of personal existence? Could I become immortal at the threshold of death?

The rumbling stopped.

The cacophony of smashing, crashing and creaking also stopped. There was dead silence and blacker-than-black darkness.

A voice pierced the stillness. "Holy shit!"

I had to chuckle. It was one of the guys who lived on the second floor.

I was in my body, on the floor, still on earth, and in shock. I'd been given another chance.

Next time, I had to be ready.

Clearly, I was going to have to find a more dependable way to relate to this unnamable, perhaps unknowable Eternal Truth. But first, I had to remember what had already been learned.

Spirituality/Memoir

By the author of

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“In a larger sense, this memoir is a dialogue between Indian spirituality and Western psychology. The question that Janis answers is: ‘Can a westerner come to know Indian spirituality and flourish in its depths, even when it is alien to western ways of knowing?’ She answers with a resounding ‘yes.’” —Publishers Weekly

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