

Publisher's Weekly Review
July 5th, 2010

Are You My Guru?

How Medicine, Meditation, and Madonna Saved My Life

Wendy Shanker

(NAL, \$15 Paper (320p); ISBN 978-0-451-22994-6)

Author of the disarmingly witty *The Fat Girl's Guide to Life*, Shanker returns with her trademark generous self-criticism to chronicle some serious health problems that struck her at age 27, in 1999. A busy New York TV producer and writer (for the Oxygen channel), Shanker finally consulted an ear, nose, and throat specialist for her chronic sinus infection and learned that she was afflicted with a rare autoimmune disease, Wegener's granulomatosis, characterized by inflammation of the tissues, especially in the respiratory tract and joints. Prescribed a corticosteroid (prednisone), which made her already troublesome weight balloon, she endured excruciating joint pain, gout, and perforation of her septum; over time she had to undergo chemotherapy in the form of Cytoxan, which made her hair fall out, killed her taste buds, and gave her terrible headaches. Meanwhile, she also took a shot at alternative treatments, including stays at the Ayurvedic Institute in New Mexico, yoga, acupuncture, even astrology and craniosacral therapy, and in a fit of despair and self-empowerment, inspired by her longtime hero Madonna ("Go ahead. Be brilliant."), quits taking all drugs because, she declares, "I'm the expert on me." In frank, vigorous prose, Shanker has redirected her grief at losing her mother early and her guilt for being overweight and ill to rediscover herself in momentous ways. (Sept.)