

Apply the Knowledge

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Ronald: Dear Sundari, I love your husband's books! There is so much I still don't get about them. I love the Christian religion, when it is translated correctly. ☺ This answers a lot for me some things I have been taught. I heard James say this will go with any religion, the truths of Vedanta! I have had some wonderful spiritual experiences, but have not been able to "shake" my addictions and problems. This has given me a lot of hope! Thank you for all your work!

~ Ronald

Sundari: Hello, Ronald.

You are very blessed to have found James and Vedanta; there is no better teacher alive on the planet and no teaching like Vedanta. Christianity has its place for people who are identified with being people; it is not a means of knowledge for liberation. Vedanta does not "go with any religion," it explains religion. I have added below the teaching on the stages of spiritual growth with regards to the logic of devotion.

Very strong *vasanas* like addictions will not go away overnight. They will take time and perseverance, but if the mind is qualified and the desire for liberation from suffering and limitation is stronger than anything else, self-knowledge will prevail.

Bhakti

Here are the different stages of *bhakti yoga*, based on the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* teachings, which you can download for free from transcriptions at the ShiningWorld website.

The tradition says there are two kinds of *bhakti* or worship, and it is compulsory for *moksa* to go through all of them, except stage 1 of the first kind. I have broken down the two stages to four stages for ease of assimilation. The first stage is *dvaita*, or dualistic, *bhakti* and it has three parts to it. The fourth stage is *advaita – jnanum*, or knowledge, non-dual *bhakti*. All three stages are stepping stones for the next stage, with the fourth stage being the end of the line, i.e. *moksa*. Although it is not the case for you, many people who come to self-inquiry have a lot of negativity towards the idea of the religious God and hate the idea of God. It is essential that you understand the importance of worship.

Dvaita (Dualistic) Bhakti

Stage 1: (Not essential, but it is a stepping stone to stage 2).

Note: Stage 1 and 2 corresponds to Chapters I through VI of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

This is informal or undisciplined worship, it is totally subjective and emotional, "heart" based. It is where all religions originate, where most *samsaris* worship a personal deity or god, seeing it as a

HE usually, a big daddy who takes care of them and listens to their problems. It is worshipping God as a person. It is childlike or childish devotion. It's about supplicating God in order to get results, getting what you want and avoiding what you don't want. This is where all religious fanaticism and dogmatism originate; it leads to sectarianism and fundamentalism. It makes people feel self-righteous, that they have "God on their side" and can act out whatever they believe "in His name," that they are better than others and their way is the only way. It gives rise to all religious wars. It also makes ordinary people feel safe, providing guidelines that help sort out relationship and life issues. This is for people who are totally identified with being people and with the world of objects.

Stage 2: This part is compulsory for self-inquiry if *moksa* is the aim.

This stage is emotional and intellectual. Here you start to practice *karma yoga* – surrendering the results of actions to *Ishvara* with an attitude of consecration and gratitude because you have realised that the results of actions are not up to you. This is to help neutralise the idea of doership.

You also practise the five *pancha yagna* (sacrifices, or activities):

1. Worship of your deity however you see it (Krishna or Ganesh are perfect).
2. Worship of your parents or ancestors.
3. Worship of your teacher and teaching.
4. Worship of society and people in general.
5. Worship of the environment (i.e. *Ishvara*).

Stage 3: *Upasana* (meditation) is also compulsory for *moksa*.

Note: This stage corresponds to Chapters VII through XII of the *Bhagavad Gita*:

This is where worship of *Ishvara*/God is objective, purely impersonal or intellectual. Knowledge of *Ishvara* and the creation start to crystallize. There is still duality and you see *Ishvara* in special forms (like icons or beauty) but gradually, as knowledge becomes firm, this progresses into seeing and worshipping *Ishvara* in all forms, the good and the bad.

All three stages of *dvaita bhakti* involve free will and the *jiva*, the person, which is why these stages are called dualistic worship. The purpose of these stages of worship or *bhakti* is that these practices reduce subjectivity and neutralize *vasanas* – likes and dislikes – as well negate the doer. It takes care of the childish ego.

Stage 4: *Advaita*, or Non-Dual, *Bhakti: Jnanum*

Note: Corresponds to Chapters XIII through XVIII of the *Bhagavad Gita*

This is the final stage of *bhakti*, it is *advaita* – non dual – *jnanum*, or self-knowledge. It is non-personal, beyond subjectivity and objectivity, i.e. *moksa*. This is non-dual vision where you see everything as the self first and second as the *jiva*, never confusing the two again. You still live as the *jiva* and so follow *dharma*, your own and universal *dharma*, which requires following the rules

of the field of existence, or *Isvara*, automatically. And you continue with *dvaita bhakti* except it is no longer dualistic in that you know that everything is you, awareness – i.e. you have permanently discriminated between *satya* and *mithya*.

To get to the fourth stage where self-knowledge has permanently obtained and translates into every aspect of the *jiva's* life is *moksa* – liberation while “in” the body. This is freedom from and for the *jiva*, who then relates to the field of existence first as awareness and second as a *jiva*.

Apply the knowledge, stick to your *sadhana*. There is no purifier like self-knowledge.

~ Much love, Sundari