

Devotional Practice

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Mathew: Thank you for your detailed and caring response. It is nice to meet you. I admit I was expecting Ram to answer; I feel like he knows me, but I get that he is very busy now. Your answer is helpful and appreciated.

Sundari: Thank you, it is nice to meet you too. 😊 I know how you must feel, it must be a bit disappointing not to have Ramji reply as there is no one quite like him! He is not too busy for you though and if you prefer he is more than happy to continue replying to you. He is in Europe at the moment and I am in Spain, so he emails me the emails that come through, as I answer most of them for him. Maybe you are not on our mailing list and did not get our last newsletter. In it we endorsed a number of new teachers and together with them I have taken over replying to the *e-satsangs*. Ramji has trained us all in his own inimitable style and we all know how to wield the knowledge correctly in keeping with the great tradition of the *sampradaya* and also Ramji's exacting adherence to the integrity of the scripture. He has a big teaching schedule and is also trying to finish several books, so we are taking the load off him. Actually, I think he meant to answer yours though; I replied to it before he could. If you like, he will still do so, no problem. I sent both replies to him before sending them to you and he gave his seal of approval on both counts.

I have replied to your points below.

Mathew: The reference to “publish another set soon,” was to the online *satsangs*, which are published every three months or so. I like to pull out excerpts to save (and savor) and reread.

Sundari: I am still not sure what you mean, because if you have been keeping up with the website, we publish a newsletter and at least 200 pages of *e-satsangs* every six weeks, eight weeks maximum.

Mathew: In the past few days I do feel something has “clicked” differently in relation to the Vedantic teachings. Ram has said before to me that the next step, so to speak (that was not his language exactly), is to let the *vasanas* wear themselves out. He has put up some of my letters as testimonials or examples, and that has felt a little odd since I didn't necessarily feel like “I have it,” or rather that my sense of identity had shifted from orbiting planet to stationary sun (so to speak).

Sundari: Ramji posts writing and *e-satsangs* on the Web that are helpful and inspiring to others. Your testimonial was beautifully written and a very good example of how the knowledge works, which is why he posted it. He sees only the self in everyone no matter what, so however you still see yourself, he sees who you really are.

With ongoing self-inquiry, exposing the mind to Vedanta and the application of

karma yoga, the knowledge itself does the work. This is why Vedanta is so effective and this is where it differs from other paths: it is both a means of knowledge – a pathless path – and a path of action, meaning that it provides tools and the instructions how to use them, which when applied rigorously and with dedication will remove ignorance and its effects. It does take commitment and dedication though, before the knowledge is firm. What Ram meant by the “*vasanas* winding down,” to use your expression, is that with the application of the knowledge to the mind, meaning the *yogas* (*karma yoga*, *triguna vibhava yoga* and of course most importantly, *jnana yoga*), it neutralises the doer and in so doing renders the binding *vasanas* non-binding. It is through understanding the *jiva-Isvara*-awareness identity that one is able to discriminate the self from the objects arising in it. Self-knowledge is the great purifier and the only thing capable of removing ignorance.

Mathew: But what the heck... I would appreciate if you could expand a little of what you said:

Sundari (from previous email): “There can be considerable work still to be done to manage the *gunas*: *triguna vibhava yoga*. The practice of *karma yoga* is imperative as well, along with a devotional practice of some kind.”

I feel Ram has given me a pretty good idea about *triguna vibhava yoga* and *karma yoga*, but what are you thinking of specifically when you mention a “devotional practice”? I did spend some time with a local Dayananda-trained *swamini* who showed up in my neighborhood a few months after encountering Ram. Her name at that time was Sadhvi Chaitanya; her name now is Svatmavidyananda. Anyway, I would say she was really big into statues, and I never quite got what the “statue thing” is all about.

Sundari: Devotional practice is not about statues or any other object. It is the understanding, through the application of self-knowledge, that everything is the self. Anything you pay attention to is devotion for the self. Devotion (*bhakti*) is a natural by-product of self-knowledge, in fact it is self-knowledge because Vedanta is about you. It reveals your true nature, which is *parama prema svarupa*, supreme love. When you see the beauty and perfection of who you are and therefore what this world is, how can one not feel love and devotion for the self? Krishna says in the *Gita*: “In whichever way you worship me (the self) I will come to you.” And he says that those who think they are worshipping other gods are just worshipping the self, because there is only the self.

The reason that devotion as a practice is encouraged in Vedanta is that it helps neutralise the ego and makes the application of *karma yoga* into a prayer to the self; giving up the results of your actions then becomes a consecration, an act of love for you by you, the self.

Mathew: What I resonate to when you say “devotional practice” is a practice of Neville Goddard, of feeling “Thank you, Father” with a sense of utter gratitude and fulfillment, of all desires fulfilled, *punyam*. Does that qualify as a devotional practice?

Sundari: Yes, indeed gratitude is the essence of devotion, which is not gratitude for something, it is gratitude in the knowledge that all is given, all is known, all is you.

There is no need for any elaborate ritual or to make a big thing of it; just paying attention and consecrating your every thought, word and deed in love for the divine is what it is all about.

~ *Om* and *prem*, Sundari