

# Be Smart and Choose Bhagavan

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**Steve:** Hi, James. First of all, being new to your site and emails, I'm not sure what the proper etiquette is re email questions. Is it okay to reply to this email or do I need to submit new questions to the ShiningWorld site? Please let me know the proper procedure if I'm not doing it.

**Sundari:** Yes, you can write in as you have done and either James or I will reply to you as soon as possible.

**Steve:** Anyway, I reread parts of your books, watched some videos and have a better idea of the *vasanas*, *gunas* and *karma yoga* and its importance. My practice was mostly meditation and reading books, so I need work on the devotion and *karma yoga* areas. I was a little confused after watching one of your videos, *Be Smart and Choose Bhagavan*. In that video, you sort of dismissed the devotional practices, saying they too were "doing" and part of *karma yoga*. Being raised Catholic, and turning away from that at a young age, I've had trouble worshipping any deities (recovering Catholics, as the old joke goes). I do enjoy listening to *kirtan* chanting, and singing along it bypasses my brain and goes straight to my heart. But after watching your video, I'm wondering if I should continue any devotional practice at all.

**Sundari:** Vedanta definitely encourages a devotional and religious attitude, although it is not a religion or a "path." *Bhakti yoga* can be helpful in negating the doer in surrendering to *Bhagavan*; however, the problem with *bhakti* is that there is a doer involved. The *bhakta* has great desire for *Bhagavan*, and if the devotee's mind is pure, he/she loves *Bhagavan* for love's sake, not for gain. But even a pure mind sees the beloved, God/*Bhagavan*, as an object, something "other" than themselves, even though it is for the sake of the self that he/she loves. If the mind is impure, the devotee relies upon their devotion to the object and that gives the *bhakta* a sense of identity, of virtue. They feel incomplete and therefore love the object (God or whatever) because it makes them feel complete. This keeps many people stuck and prevents them from negating the doer.

There is nothing wrong with devotion to and worship of anything that symbolises the self. The advantage that a *bhakta* enjoys over a *kami* (one who desires ordinary love for and from objects, like another person) is that God/*Bhagavan* is always available, whereas a person or a thing is not. *Bhagavan* is consciousness, and consciousness responds when it is invoked. It responds predictably with love because it is love.

Freedom (*moksa*) is freedom from dependence on objects. Devotion to *Bhagavan*, while essential, ideally needs to be a practice of pure gratitude, born out of the understanding that it is all you, the self - and as a *jiva* you are privileged to experience it. This is what James means when he says, "Choose *Bhagavan*." *Parabhakti* is when love is known to be YOU, awareness. It is your nature, God is known to be you, it is having all you could ever want and knowing it will never leave you. It is a feeling of limitless satisfaction, *parama sukka* is the phrase used in the

texts. The self, awareness, is *parama prema svarupa*, which means “the knowledge of your limitless nature.”

**Steve:** Re *karma yoga*, I have a better understanding of what that is, thanks to your book and videos. I understand the teaching, as you explain it on an intellectual level; my problem is putting it into practice on a daily basis. I mean, it’s easy to sit and meditate, but the *karma yoga* thing is not that simple (or is it?). Any advice in this area would be helpful.

**Sundari:** *Karma yoga* is simple, but it is not an easy practice for the doer, because it is aimed at negating it. It is simply the knowledge that the fruits of the actions are not up to you and dedicating every thought, word and deed on a moment-to-moment basis to *Bhagavan*. What would help you enormously would be *triguna vibhava yoga*, the teaching of the *gunas*. I have just posted a very long *satsang* on this topic, as it is so very important. You will find it on the “What’s New” page, in the newsletter that has been posted there. I will send you the *satsang* in case you cannot find it.

~ *Om* and *prem*, Sundari