

VEDANTA CENTER OF ATLANTA

Open Forum on Bhakti

May 29, 2016

This is a month for the study of Bhakti Yoga, the path of reverence and devotion. Bhakti Yoga is the evolution of a loving relationship with God through prayer, ritual, worship, and self-surrender.

In this practice, all human emotions and tendencies are given “a Godward turn.” As part of their spiritual quest, bhakti yogis deliberately use and offer these energies to their Beloved (Chosen Ideal).

A bhakta’s practice typically begins as a dualistic way of thought: “I am; He or She is.” Over time, this becomes, “He or She is; I am a part of That.” With continued practice, total self-surrender arises.

No barrier of ego remains, and the devotee becomes one with the Divine Presence in a union of all-embracing love.

A bhakti yogi is often drawn to this path by an Incarnation of God, or avatar: Krishna, Jesus, Buddha, Sri Ramakrishna. The bhakta is inspired by the life and teachings of “God With Us” in human form, and is encouraged by the Incarnation’s promises of direct personal help, when the devotee makes some sincere, persistent personal effort:

Sri Krishna: “Turn to me in utter devotion and I see no sinner — you will come to me.”

Jesus: “My burden is light ... I will show you the truth and the truth shall set you free.”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Practice just a little and someone will come forward to help you ... I am the refuge.” In life, the Master gave away his spiritual treasures without stint. At death, he promised to stay with his devotees, in a subtle form, for 200 years, then take birth again.

On the other side of this sheet, you’ll find *A Bhakta’s Prayer*. It is a song sung here from time to time at morning Arati.

A Bhakta's Prayer

O Lord, take my hand,
O Lord, take my hand,
without Thee I may fall,
without Thee I may fall! (1)

O Lord pull me on,
O Lord pull me on,
without Thee I may fall,
without Thee I may fall! (2)

O Lord draw me near,
O Lord draw me near,
Thou art my all in all,
Thou art my all in all! (3)

O Lord fill this heart,
O Lord fill this heart,
Thou art my all in all,
Thou art my all in all!

(1) *"It is rather easy for a child to stumble if he holds his father's hand; but there can be no such fear if the father holds the child's hand."* Gospel of Sri RK, Ch. 4, Advice to Householders

(2) A child is easily distracted, or may become confused.
Example.: Arjuna to Krishna (Bhagavad Gita, Ch. 2) — *"Krishna, I beg you, tell me frankly and clearly what I ought to do. I am your disciple. I put myself into your hands. Show me the way."*

(3) *"Does the magnet say to the iron, 'Come near me?' That is not necessary. Because of the attraction of the magnet, the iron rushes to it."* Gospel of Sri RK, Ch. 24, to Pundit Shashadar