

## God's Goodness is Beyond Good and Bad

Hi Ram,

Once again, apologies in advance for this long email. As ever, I look forward to your reply whenever you have enough time to respond....

Please roughly define the exact DISTINCTIONS between.....Atman,Brahman, Iswara - I have read that Atman ULTIMATELY is Brahman...BUT they are 2 different words & there is obviously a reason for this and subtle distinction between their usage. Roughly - I thought that Atman/Brahman is non-dual awareness. Both are NOT under the spell of maya,right ?? So they are the pure self which experience no duality?? How does Iswara relate to these?

Ram: Atma and Brahman are just two different words for non-dual awareness. Atman is Awareness with reference to the individual. Brahman is Awareness without any associations, qualities, etc.

From Awareness' point of view there is no universe so it cannot be the creator of the universe or the universe itself. Maya is a power in Awareness. It does the impossible; makes it seem as if there is a created universe. In conjunction with Maya a universe appears like a mirage. To explain the apparent creation from the individual's point of view...who doesn't know that there is only Awareness appearing as a creature and a creator, the concept of Iswara or God is brought in. Iswara is just Awareness associated with the apparent total and jiva, the individual, is Awareness associated with the apparent individual.

Arun: Iswara is a concept that I never really even considered till your previous email. So you mentioned Iswara is the "total Self functioning through all the subtle bodies". What are subtle bodies?? I thought that only Jiva's had subtle bodies, but not everything in this jagat therefore has a subtle body (e.g. a stone)??

Ram: Minerals, chemicals, have no subtle bodies. They are just inert elements or Iswara's gross body which is called Virat. All conscious beings have a gross, subtle and causal body...from unicellular organisms up to man. In the plant kingdom the subtle bodies are extremely rudimentary. In moving organisms with nervous systems they are more complex and in man the subtle body is the most highly developed. It includes not only sensation but also intellect which allows the jiva to think, reason, choose and inquire.

Arun: You also said that Iswara is an Upadhi (limiting notion) - so that means despite you saying.... "Iswara's power & knowledge are limitless" ....then you say that Iswara is limited? This is a contradiction?

Ram: With reference to the creation Iswara is limitless in power, knowledge and action. But with reference to the Self it is limited. It has a beginning and an end and is dependent on Awareness. This is why the Self is 'beyond' the Creator, God.

What you see, the objects, are just a projection of Maya, ignorance. They have no independent

existence although they seem to. From the individual's point of view it seems as if it exists because the creation exists. The creation was here and I was born into it; therefore, I must be the product of something else. It seems to most that their consciousness is the result of material evolution. This is the 'scientific' point of view. In Vedanta it is called *sristi dristi vada*, "I see the world because it is here." But in fact Consciousness was here before the creation and this Consciousness, which is uncreated, due to its association with Maya, projects a creation, 'like an image in a mirror' to quote the Upanishad. This 'primordial' Consciousness is right here now as your own consciousness. This view is called *dristi-sristi vada*, 'the creation is here because I see it.' It is understandable that humans get it backwards because they take the body to be the Self.

Arun: Please let me know what you think of my vague understanding of *Iswara* - The total Self that pervades this *jagat* that is the creator & substance of this *jagat* YET it is still under the spell of Maya and ignorance (*avidya*). *Iswara* has qualities of the western concept of God i.e. omniscience, omnipresence, intelligence etc. .... so *Brahman* is a word for non-dual consciousness which is ATTRIBUTELESS and completely uninvolved in creation or this *jagat*. Does any of that sound right ??

Ram: Very close. *Iswara* is the total ignorance and is called Maya and has the qualities... attributes...you mentioned. When this ignorance appears in a subtle body i.e. a conscious being it is called *avidya*. *Brahman*, the Self, Awareness is free of all attributes and is completely uninvolved in the creation as you say.

Arun: Therefore is it possible for a *jiva* to realise its identity with *Iswara* but NOT with *Brahman*? (because even *Iswara* is an *Upadhi* and is *Mithya*??)

Ram: *Jiva* and *Iswara* are both *upadhis* (notions) and are *mithya*. To put it in plain English 'individual' and 'God' are just concepts; they have no actual referent. It is possible for a *jiva* to realize its identity with both *Iswara* and *Brahman* because the content of all three is Awareness.

Arun: In fact, is this a necessary stage that a *Jiva* must realise, before realising its identity with *Brahman*?? i.e. step 1 - Identify with *Jiva*, step 2 - Identify with *Iswara*; step 3 - negate steps 1 & 2 leaving *Brahman* alone. ??

Ram: *Jiva* is already identified with *jiva*. This means that you take yourself to be a limited individual. When you realize that you are non-different from everything ('your' body is just the five elements and that 'your' subtle body is just the thoughts and feelings floating around in the macrocosmic subtle body) it destroys your sense of limitation and you simultaneously realize that you are only the seer, awareness. You are not the individual because you see the individual; it is an object to you. Arun is just a name given to Awareness and a certain bundle of *vasanas*. The total is you, Awareness, but you are not the total because the total is an idea, an object, a concept. You are the one in whom the idea of individual and total appears. Did you ever see an individual? Did you ever see a total? No, you only see Consciousness and Consciousness appearing as objects.

Arun: Ram - do "you" (the *Jiva* that is Ram) or have you ever associated yourself with being almighty, all-powerful, all-knowing God (*Iswara*)?? If that be the case, does that mean there really are *Jiva's* who really are all-powerful in this *jagat* and have the power to create or destroy this entire *jagat*??? As opposed to an enlightened master who identifies with Brahman who claims no attributes of *Iswara*.

Ram: *Jivas* that claim identity with *Iswara* are only sane if they understand that they do not possess unlimited power, knowledge and action. The only basis of the claim of identity with *Iswara* is that the content of both *jiva* and *Iswara* is Awareness. How could a *jiva* create, sustain and destroy the universe? They say Sai Baba is *Iswara* but all he can manage is a few small miracles. They say Amachi is God but all she can hug is 15,000 in a day. When she can hug the whole creation all at once then she's God. Both *jiva* and *Iswara* are *mithya*, apparently real, in so far as they do not stand alone. Only you, Awareness, stands alone. How can God or the individual do anything without Awareness?

Arun: you mentioned..."if you think you are doing something you are incorrect; you are actually being done by *Iswara*.." ."all apparent individual will powers are just the power of *Iswara*"..... OK - lets really simplify this problem - I am moving my hand to type on this keyboard. You are saying that the apparent independent-*Jiva* based will power to move my hand; is NOT actually controlled by this *Jiva* that is "Arun"?? Are you saying *Iswara* - which is a separate conscious, intelligent entity from this *Jiva* - is the entity in control of what this *Jiva* thinks & does ??? This control is dependent upon the *Jiva's Vasana's* ?? So really there is ABSOLUTELY NO *jiva*-based free will ??? So even the desire for liberation by *Jiva* is controlled by *Iswara* ?? Sorry Ram....I know im probably opening up a pandora's box by asking that one...but i gotta know!!

Ram: The short answer is yes. It does not seem this way to *jiva*, however. This is why scripture guided inquiry is necessary. In the dream of *Maya*, the *jiva* thinks it is deciding things and causing actions to happen but it isn't. Its *vasanas*...which are just *Iswara's vasanas*...are causing things to happen. 'Thy will, not mine' doesn't mean that my will is separate from *Iswara's*. It means that there is only *Iswara's* will. When you realize this you cease to be a doer. The realization that *Iswara* is the doer frees you of action and desire for results of action and the mind becomes absorbed in the Self.

*Iswara* is not a distinct separate entity from *Jiva*. *Jiva* is *Iswara* under the spell of *avidya*, ignorance. *Iswara* is Awareness/Consciousness and *jiva* is Awareness/Consciousness.

Arun: Changing topic slightly.....Self is characterized by existence-consciousness-bliss. OK....so what is "bliss" exactly? I normally associate the word "bliss" with being a very positive happy experience. But the self in its pure form (sat-chit-ananda?) should certainly have nothing to do with bliss as an experience, right? The self should be neither negative nor positive, but bliss seems to imply a positive attribute?

Ram: Good reasoning. This is correct. Experiential bliss is the result of certain factors...basically a mind free of agitation. The 'bliss' of the Self is simply the realization that you have no limits. It is just pure knowledge but it has a very powerful experiential component...but not 'feel good' happiness. It translates into the Subtle Body as a sense of solidity, permanence, and confidence

that transcends anything that happens. It never goes away. It is there during the most intense agonies and ecstasies. If you meet a proper mahatma the one thing you will notice above all is a rock solid sense of self confidence.

Arun: On that note.... what's the deal with *Iswara* and it being inherently "good" (I'm guessing this is the case)? Surely morality from an absolute standpoint of Self (non-dual awareness) is just irrelevant. Why is it that "Good"/Dharmic actions are necessary for creating a peaceful mind IF the notions of good and bad are simply relative concepts. EVERYTHING in this *jagat* is from *Iswara*, so who cares if this *Jiva* engages in "good" or "bad" activities? Does it really matter from the standpoint of enlightenment??

Ram: No, it does not matter from Awareness' point of view. But it does from *jiva's* point of view. If the individual doesn't act in harmony with the universal physical and moral laws of *Iswara's* creation it will suffer. And since suffering is not desirable and freedom is, it needs to follow dharma because freedom is only secured by a happy mind.

Moral goodness is dualistic. It depends on the idea that there is badness. In Maya there is both *dharma* and *adharma*, good and bad. But God's 'goodness' is non-dual. It has nothing to do with good and bad. In Maya something that is good at one time is not necessarily good at another. Likewise for bad things. But *Iswara's* goodness is the goodness of what is essential. You have many forms of sugar, for example, but what makes sugar what it is? Sweetness. And what is always good as far as you are concerned? Only you. Why? Because without you good and bad have no meaning whatsoever.

Arun: *Vasana* Theory - so *vasana's*, or mental tendencies accrued from past incarnations of this *Jiva*, can be good or bad - right?

Ram: Yes. It is better to think of them as helpful and unhelpful. Helpful means those that are conducive to a quiet mind and inquiry and unhelpful means those that aren't.

Arun: Should I be ONLY indulging/allowing the expression of "good" *vasana's* (goodness being relatively judged by my *buddhi*) and suppressing bad ones?? Or do I need to allow the full expression of both good AND BAD *vasana's*?? e.g. I have a strong lustful desire for women; however my *buddhi* also realizes this *vasana* could be very damaging in terms of cultivating a *sattvic* mind... but nonetheless the *vasana* still is very powerful & seeks to express itself and is very difficult to resist. What is the best course of action to deal with such a *vasana*? I am even using the correct "*vasana*" terminology here??

Ram: You are correct in using the *vasana* terminology. The short answer is that you should sin intelligently. Don't overindulge and don't suppress too much...and don't let the worldly *vasanas* keep you from inquiring. Try to stay awake when you indulge. The natural tendency when you are chasing pleasure is to fall asleep spiritually. It feels so good you stop observing and then you don't learn what you need to learn...that the joy is not in the object. And when the *vasana* is there and the object not there, observe the way the mind thinks.

It is important not to run away from your desires because you think they are 'bad'...as long as

they are not desires for violence, deceit, etc. Awareness is the desire that is not opposed to *dharma*. Indulge them but when they quit producing joy stop and let the body and mind recuperate. And don't go past the point where they cause you to contravene the physical and moral laws.

See the limitation in the pleasure. There will be attachment where pleasure is involved and this is not bad as long as the mind does not become obsessed. Even if it does...as it did with me when I was young...it is OK...if you become a complete pig. But you have to do it to the point of wretched excess so that you 'hit bottom'. This means that you realize the pain involved in pleasure. When you understand the dualistic nature of sense indulgence you approach it with a clear mind and it cannot bite you.

Finally, it is important to understand that the desire for pleasure or security or whatever, is really the desire for freedom...since it is a sense of freedom that you experience when you get what you want.

Aidtya: Thanks again for your skillfull guidance - your responses normally require me to take a couple of weeks to read, re-read, research relevant topics than re-read it again!! Only after all of that do the points you make become a little clearer in my mind.

Ram: It's my pleasure. This is the proper way of inquiry, Arun.

Love,

Ram