

An Exchange Concerning *Vasanas, Samskaras, Reincarnation and Moksa*

Ted Schmidt

2015-02-27

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/2012>

The following dialogue begins with my response to an inquiry that had been submitted to the website *Advaita-Vision* and the subsequent series of exchanges that took place between the site master and myself.

Self-Knowledge: Is It Worth the Fuss? [my original response]

Thomas: At the end of the day, what does knowledge of self give us?

Ted: It frees one from suffering.

Thomas: It does not help answer the burning question of why the appearance/dream/*maya* that we are experiencing as humans or animals exists.

Ted: True. There is no reason for experience. There simply obtains the existential irony that inherent in pure awareness is the deluding power of *maya*, ignorance, which makes pure awareness appear to be something that it's not, a circumstance that upon further consideration nullifies the "why" question altogether, since nothing is actually happening given the fact that reality is non-dual; nothing other than awareness exists and thus no essential change in the nature of reality is possible.

Thomas: I am not clear on this one, but it appears that even though one attains knowledge of self in one *janma*, he/she can actually become a cockroach in the next due to *karmic* effect, i.e. we are not really liberated from the birth-death cycle.

Ted: Actually, one who attains self-knowledge realizes that he is not the apparent individual person he appears and had formerly taken himself to be. Rather he knows himself to be *atma*, pure awareness, which is not subject to birth and death, and thus does not reincarnate.

Moreover, the idea that the apparent individual person reincarnates is a mistaken understanding of the concept of reincarnation. The apparent person one seems to be does not transmigrate to another body. Rather the *vasana*-bundle that was associated with the apparent individual's subtle body migrates to another subtle body that can serve as a suitable vehicle for any *vasanas* remaining in the *karmic* account from which that *vasana*-bundle originally came and continues to be associated.

Following the logic of the previous explanation leads to the inevitable conclusion that the

vasanas are not personal. Though they associate with and express through the mind-body-sense complex that constitutes a particular individual, and moreover, can be reinforced, neutralized or even generated by means of the apparent choices and actions of that apparent individual, the source of all *vasanas* is the macrocosmic causal body, which is personified as *Isvara*, and thus are essentially *Isvara*'s tendencies manifesting through the vast array of apparent individuals whose mind-body-sense mechanisms serve as vehicles for their expression.

Regarding the concept of reincarnation, therefore we can say that on the one hand the notion is completely erroneous, or to paraphrase Krishna's comments in the *Bhagavad Gita* it is an explanation intended to provisionally satisfy the minds of the ignorant.

On the other hand, it is true that the *jiva*, or apparent individual person, is never free of the cycle of birth and death. In order to properly understand this circumstance, however, we must realize that the *jiva* is a universal entity. Though it looks like there are innumerable *jivas*, there is in reality only one, for all *jivas* are essentially the same. The gross bodies of all are made of the same five elements, the subtle bodies of all are constituted of the same component functions and the causal bodies attributed to all are actually portions of the same universal causal body. Moreover, *maya* is a power inherent in pure awareness and will forever serve as the conditioning agent by means of which the apparent reality is projected time and again through an interminable cycle of manifestation and dissolution. Hence the universal *jiva* will continue to manifest indefinitely despite the eradication of *avidya*, personal self-ignorance, in any given individual *jiva*.

Thomas: The only benefit I do see in a *janma* where one attains knowledge of self is that they might lead a life devoid of misery in the mind as they sail through good and bad times even though they may experience physical pain.

~ Thomas

Ted: This is the point of self-knowledge. While pain and pleasure persist, suffering ceases. That's a pretty powerful consequence.

But you are right. As long as you don't mind suffering, self-knowledge is not necessarily worth the fuss.

~ All the best, Ted

[Ernest's response]

Ernest: Hi, Ted, I am happy to post your answer as written, but if I do, presumably you will not mind if I interpolate a comment regarding your statement about universal *jiva*?

Interpolation: Sorry to butt in again here, but this is not my understanding. Causal bodies are on a per-*jiva* basis and there are (from a *vyavaharika* perspective) many *jivas*. The concept of a "universal *jiva*" makes no sense. *Isvara* "allocates" bodies to reincarnating *jivas* according to accumulated *karma* of that *jiva*. See my essays on this at Advaita Academy, *Between Lives* and *The Fires of Reincarnation*.

Alternatively, you could reword if you prefer.

~ Best wishes, Ernest

[My revised response; note that my added comments are indented]:

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Thomas: It does not help answer the burning question of why the appearance/dream/*maya* that we are experiencing as humans or animals exists.

Ted: True. There is no reason for experience. There simply obtains the existential irony that inherent in pure awareness is the deluding power of *maya*, ignorance, which makes pure awareness appear to be something that it's not, a circumstance that upon further consideration nullifies the "why" question altogether, since nothing is actually happening given the fact that reality is non-dual; nothing other than awareness exists and thus no essential change in the nature of reality is possible.

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Ted: Actually, one who attains self-knowledge realizes that he is not the apparent individual person he appears and had formerly taken himself to be. Rather he knows himself to be *atma*, pure awareness, which is not subject to birth and death, and thus does not reincarnate.

Moreover, the idea that the apparent individual person reincarnates is a mistaken understanding of the concept of reincarnation. The apparent person one seems to be does not transmigrate to another body. Rather the *vasana*-bundle that was associated with the apparent individual's subtle body migrates to another subtle body that can serve as a suitable vehicle for any *vasanas* remaining in the *karmic* account from which that *vasana*-bundle originally came and continues to be associated.

Following the logic of the previous explanation leads to the inevitable conclusion that the *vasanas* are not personal. Though they associate with and express through the mind-body-sense complex that constitutes a particular individual, and moreover, can be reinforced, neutralized or even generated by means of the apparent choices and actions of that apparent individual, the source of all *vasanas* is the macrocosmic causal body, which is personified as *Isvara*, and thus are essentially *Isvara's* tendencies manifesting through the vast array of apparent individuals whose mind-body-sense mechanisms serve as vehicles for their expression.

Regarding the concept of reincarnation, therefore we can say that on the one hand the notion is completely erroneous, or to paraphrase Krishna's comments in the *Bhagavad Gita*, it is an explanation intended to provisionally satisfy the minds of the ignorant.

On the other hand, it is true that the *jiva*, or apparent individual person, is never free of the cycle of birth and death. In order to properly understand this circumstance, however, we must realize that the *jiva* is a universal entity. Though it looks like there are innumerable *jivas*, there is in reality only one, for all *jivas* are essentially the same. The gross bodies of all are made of the same five elements, the subtle bodies of all are constituted of the same component functions and the causal bodies attributed to all are actually portions of the same universal causal body. Moreover, *maya* is a power inherent in pure awareness and will forever serve as the conditioning agent by means of which the apparent reality is projected time and again through an interminable cycle of manifestation and dissolution. Hence the universal *jiva* will continue to manifest indefinitely despite the eradication of *avidya*, personal self-ignorance, in any given individual *jiva*.

This topic is actually a perfect example of how Vedanta is not an "either-or" proposition, but rather a "both-and" understanding that is dependent on one's ability to navigate between the relative and the universal perspectives, to understand experience from not only the apparent individual's point of view, but also those of *Isvara* (i.e. the macrocosmic mind) and *brahman* (i.e. absolute, non-dual awareness), though, technically speaking, *brahman*, limitless conscious existence, has no particular point of view or definable scope of being.

From the *jiva's*, or apparent individual's, point of view within the context of the apparent reality, the *jiva* does seem to be a discrete entity whose subtle body is on a transmigratory journey through a series of gross bodies that afford it the appropriate circumstances through which to express, experience and eventually exhaust, the *vasanas* stored in its causal body. As long as the *jiva* takes itself to be a *karta*, a doer, it reaps the results of its *karmas*, actions, in the form of *punya*, merits, and *papa*, demerits. Essentially, these merits and demerits take the form of *vasanas*, impressions, that add to or reinforce those already stored in the causal body and inevitably enter the subtle body when the appropriate circumstances for their expression present themselves, either within the context of the *jiva's* present incarnation or a subsequent one, where they manifest as *raga-dveshas*, likes and dislikes, that compel the *jiva* to act (i.e. think, speak, behave and pursue particular objects) in an effort to satisfy them. No limited object obtained or limited action executed by a limited entity (i.e. the *jiva*) can produce a limitless result, however, and thus no object or action is capable of providing the *jiva* with the permanent peace and happiness that is the essential, albeit usually unconscious, goal of all the *jiva's* deeds. Hence all of the *jiva's* *vasana*-driven endeavors only cause suffering and the accumulation of more *vasanas* that eventually must find expression. In this way the *jiva* remains bound to the wheel of *samsara*, the cycle of birth and death, from which ultimately only self-knowledge, the understanding that nullifies the erroneous notion of individuality along with its twin aspects of doer-ship and enjoyer-ship, and thus closes the *jiva's* *karmic* account, offers emancipation. Harboring no more *karma* that requires circumstances in which to fructify, the *jiva's* journey ends with the dissolution of both the subtle and causal bodies into pure consciousness.

From *Isvara's* point of view, the *jiva's* journey never ends. That is, any particular apparent entity's transmigratory journey to self-realization, or quest for *moksa*, ultimate inner freedom, or liberation from all sense of limitation, ends with the eradication of *avidya*, the microcosmic

aspect of *maya* that takes the form of personal ignorance. However, due to the fact that it is an inherent power in awareness and as such is unborn, or beginningless and hence endless, *maya* itself persists indefinitely and will continue to condition pure awareness and make it appear to be something it is not by projecting “upon” it the appearance of the apparent reality, replete with innumerable *jivas*, each of whom owes their personal character to the constellation of *vasanas* he or she has drawn from the universal pool of *vasanas* that is the macrocosmic causal body or, in personified terms, *Isvara*. For this reason, *jivas* will continue to manifest as apparent entities until the time of *pralaya*, universal dissolution. In this sense there is no end to what might be referred to as the “universal *jiva*,” the archetypal apparent individual entity.

From *brahman*’s perspective, of course there is nothing other than pure awareness, and therefore the whole notion of reincarnation is a moot point, for nothing is actually happening, no essential change has ever occurred. No entity was ever bound and no entity need be freed.

Thomas: The only benefit I do see in a *janma* where one attains knowledge of self is that they might lead a life devoid of misery in the mind as they sail through good and bad times even though they may experience physical pain.

~ Thomas

Ted: This is the point of self-knowledge. While pain and pleasure persist, suffering ceases. That’s a pretty powerful consequence.

But you are right. As long as you don’t mind suffering, self-knowledge is not necessarily worth the fuss.

~ All the best, Ted

[Ernest’s second response]:

Ernest: Hi, Ted. I’m still mystified by this in the second paragraph: “From *Isvara*’s point of view, the *jiva*’s journey never ends.” This gives the impression that an individual can never gain *moksa* and will always be subject to *samsara*. Do you mean to say that there will always be *jivas* because new humans are being born from “promoted” vegetable and animal *jivas*? The traditional view is that when a person gains self-knowledge, the body-mind continues until the *prarabdha* is exhausted and then that body-mind (person) ceases to exist, as the *jivatman* attains *videha-mukti*. That surely signifies the end of that *jiva*’s journey.

I have also not encountered the idea of a “universal pool of *vasanas*.” Surely each *jiva*’s *vasanas* are determined by the accumulated, unfructified *samskaras* from the previous lives of that *jiva* (not anyone else’s). How does “universal pool” fit into the theory of *karma*?

Purushottama is not a term I use. I know it occurs in the *Gita*, but I confess that I am not all that knowledgeable on the *Gita*! I would use the term *paramatman* or, less confusing from a *vyavaharika* perspective, *Isvara*.

~ Best wishes, Ernest

[My response to Ernest's second response]:

Ernest: Hi, Ted. I'm still mystified by this in the second paragraph: "From *Isvara's* point of view, the *jiva's* journey never ends."

Ted: Thank you for your critique in regard to this statement. I agree it is a little misleading. The point of the statement is, as you surmise, that there is no end to the generation of *jivas* – until the *pralaya*, the cosmic dissolution. And even then, *jivas* will again be generated during the next cycle of manifestation. What I am trying to explicate is the fact from a broader perspective, the idea that individuality is nothing more than *mithya*, apparent, that the seemingly independent, volitional entity I erroneously take myself to be is nothing more than a puppet whose every action is empowered solely by the will of *Isvara*. As Krishna, speaking as the self, tells Arjuna in the eighteenth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, "The Lord remains at the seat of the intellect of all beings, Arjuna!, causing all beings to move, revolve, by (magic of his) *maya*, (like) those (figures) which are mounted on a machine (are made to revolve)." (XVIII.61, trans. Swami Dayananda).

Having said that, I do agree with your next comment...

Ernest: This gives the impression that an individual can never gain *moksa* and will always be subject to *samsara*.

Ted: I did try to clarify that the *jiva's* journey does end with the eradication of *avidya*, personal ignorance. Thus the apparent individual can gain *moksa*, liberation.

Ernest: Do you mean to say that there will always *jivas* because new humans are being born from "promoted" vegetable and animal *jivas*?

Ted: Yes. The point is that *jivas* do not cease to be. And that actually, whether I am incarnate or not makes little difference in terms of *moksa*, for essentially *moksa* is the understanding that I am not the apparent individual person I seem to be, but rather *atma*, which is *brahman*, limitless awareness. Thus while I may still be associated with a mind-body-sense complex, I am not identified with it.

Ernest: The traditional view is that when a person gains self-knowledge, the body-mind continues until the *prarabdha* is exhausted and then that body-mind (person) ceases to exist as the *jivatman* attains *videha-mukti*. That surely signifies the end of that *jiva's* journey.

Ted: Exactly. Such is the result of the eradication of *avidya*, personal ignorance. And this is the end of the *jiva's* journey. This explanation, which is scripturally-sanctioned as a provisional

understanding for those who still take themselves to be *jivas*, nevertheless begs the question “What does it mean to cease to exist as the *jivatman*?”

In order to answer this question, however, we must first consider the question “What exactly is the *jivatman*?” If it is the *pancha-koshas*, the five sheaths, then it will not cease to exist, because the *pancha-koshas* are the impersonal constituents of all *jivas* and will continue to be so until the time of the cosmic dissolution. If it is *atma*, pure awareness, then it will not cease to exist because *brahman-atma*, limitless awareness, is the eternal reality, the very essence of existence itself. The *jivatman* must therefore be nothing more than the notion of ownership/ownership/enjoyer-ship that is assumed with regard to the *vrittis*, mental activities, that arise within the subtle body of the apparent individual due to the particular bundle of *vasanas*, impressions and impression-based preferences and interpretations, conditioning it.

It would seem then that ceasing to exist as the *jivatman* is primarily a matter of ceasing to identify with the mind-body-sense complex, which in turn nullifies the need for the *vasana*-bundle informing the mind-body-sense complex with which it is associated to inhabit any subsequently generated mind-body-sense complex. Thus once the *jiva*'s *prarabdha karma* has been exhausted (i.e. once the bundle of *vasana*-inspired desires slated to play out through the vehicle of the mind-body-sense mechanism presently inhabited by the *jiva*), the *jivatman* ceases to exist.

But again, what exactly is it that ceases to exist? The mind-body-sense complex that “housed,” that gave form to, the *jiva* was made of the same five causal, subtle and gross elements as all other mind-body-sense complexes, and since energy (which is essentially what the elements are) cannot be destroyed, these elements will simply return to the universal pool of elements, which will continue to generate *jivas* for as long as *maya* conditions *brahman*, and thus it will not technically cease to exist, although the elements that constituted it will obviously cease to assume any of the unique variations of its basic archetypal form that they had previously assumed. And of course *atma*, awareness, will not cease to exist, for it essentially is existence. Hence only the notion that “I am a *jiva*,” my identification with being an apparent individual, ceases.

From the *jiva*'s point of view, the journey through innumerable mind-body-sense complexes comes to an end. *Moksa*, freedom, is attained.

From *Isvara*'s point of view, one of its components realized its true identity, so to speak, but the grand mechanism of the manifest universe continues to function as it ever has. Or, to employ another analogy, so ends another subplot within the major plot of the cosmic dream.

The question of where the material for the mechanism or the fodder for the dream comes from leads to subject of your next comments and subsequent question concerning *karma*.

Ernest: I have also not encountered the idea of a “universal pool of *vasanas*.”

Ted: Not in those terms perhaps, but you have encountered it in the form of the concept of *Isvara*. *Isvara* is the personification, so to speak, of what in technical or impersonal terms we might refer to as the macrocosmic causal body, which is the totality of all microcosmic, or personal, or individual, causal bodies. As such *Isvara* is the “universal pool of *vasanas*.” In this regard, we can liken *Isvara*, or the macrocosmic causal body, to the program for a video game in which are

contained all possible moves. Within the mind of *Isvara*, or the macrocosmic causal body, abide all possible *vasanas*, impressions/ideas, in a dormant state. These *vasanas* constitute both the initial “blueprints” for all objects/experiences, the most basic of which are the three *gunas*, and the consequent impressions that are accumulated by the *jiva* through his or her encounter with them. In other words, *Isvara’s vasanas* (i.e. ideas) are the basis for the projected apparent reality, and these projections in turn leave their mark on the *jiva*, which is itself a *vasana*/concept, who interacts with them. Furthermore, the *jiva’s* subjective interpretation of these *vasanas* (i.e. objects/experiences) is rooted in the *jiva’s vasana*-influenced values, which determine the *jiva’s raga-dveshas*, likes and dislikes.

In view of this analysis, we see that the apparent reality is essentially a stack of *vasanas*. *Isvara’s vasanas* are the basis for the projection of the manifest universe in its *vyavaharika* (i.e. gross-universal-transactional) aspect, including the mind-body-sense apparatus of the *jiva*, and also provide the archetypal possibilities inherent in its *pratibhasika* (i.e. subtle-subjective-internal) aspect. By means of his or her interactions with *Isvara’s vasanas* the *jiva* then accumulates *vasanas* that become associated with the particular subtle body informing that *jiva*, and these *vasanas* consequently become what we think of as the *jiva’s* personal *vasanas*. These *vasanas* then influence the *jiva’s* values, determine the *jiva’s* preferences and, depending on the degree of their intensity, inspire or compel the *jiva’s* actions. As long as the *jiva* remains self-ignorant, he or she will invariably perform actions through which he or she cultivates new *vasanas* or reinforces those already cultivated. Those *vasanas* that are sufficiently strengthened through repeated indulgence begin to control the *jiva*, at which point the *jiva* can no longer resist their influence. Such *vasanas* are said to be “binding,” and they compel the *jiva* to pursue the particular desirable objects, which only further fortifies the *vasanas* and thereby sentences the *jiva* to a life characterized by suffering.

As mentioned, the *gunas* are the basic constituents, or primordial *vasanas*, of which all objects are made. As such the *gunas* determine the quality and character of the *jiva’s* subtle body. In turn the *jiva’s* subtle body, or mind, interacts with the *vasanas* it encounters in the form of the objects constituting *vyavaharikasatyam*, the transactional reality. Though these objects are essentially *sattvic*, composed as they are of *Isvara’s vasanas*, and are thus neutral in terms of such polarities as good/bad, right/wrong, desirable/undesirable, etc., the *jiva* superimposes upon them a subjective interpretation or evaluation that is based on the quality of the *vasanas* influencing his or her psyche, these subjective interpretations/evaluations are the *vasanas*, or impressions, of the experience that are stored in the portion of the macrocosmic causal body that is associated with and contains the *vasana*-bundle associated with this particular *jiva*, which is what we might call the microcosmic causal body, or the personal unconscious. These *vasanas* inevitably manifest initially as likes and dislikes in the *jiva’s* subtle body and subsequently as behavior carried out through the vehicle of the gross body that is compelled or at least influenced by those *vasana*-based preferences and proclivities.

At this point the cycle continues to play out indefinitely through the microcosmic causal, subtle and gross bodies that comprise the *jiva* until such time as the *jiva* assimilates self-knowledge and gains *moksa*, freedom from its identification with these three bodies, the inherent sense of incompleteness that accompanies this identification, the consequent pursuit of objects that the *jiva* erroneously believes will provide him or her with permanent fulfillment and lasting happiness, and the inevitable suffering that ensues when the objects fail to meet the *jiva’s* expectations.

The underlying truth is that ultimately the *vasanas* cannot be personal, for the *jiva* is not the Creator. Though they seem to be personal because of their association with the *jiva* and their apparent cultivation, reinforcement and eventual neutralization through the *jiva's* actions, the *vasanas* must have their source in a far more powerful and pervasive being that is responsible for the projections that take place via the vehicles of the myriad *jivas* inhabiting the apparent reality, which are, to reiterate the words of Krishna, nothing more than figures mounted on the grand machine of the manifest universe who are caused to move by the magic of *Isvara's maya*.

Accordingly, if the nullification of the doer-enjoyer and the closing of the *jiva's karmic* account are effects of understanding rather than exhaustive action, then to whom do the *vasanas* belong? "*Maya*," we might answer. But *maya* is ignorance, and ignorance is not an entity as such. Ironically, ignorance is *Isvara's* creative power, and thus *Isvara's* essential character as the Creator. It is in this sense that all *vasanas* belong to *Isvara*.

As a final note, the fact that *Isvara* can be equated with what is referred to as the macrocosmic causal body, the total of all causal bodies, is supported by the distinction Vedanta makes between *Isvara* and *prajna*. *Atma* in its association with the *jiva* is referred to as *prajna*, whereas in its association with the total it is referred to as *Isvara*. Simply put, *Isvara* as the Creator is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent, and thus by definition must be the cosmic source of all the possible ideas, which we might call "original or creative *vasanas*" that manifest as experienceable objects as well as the universal reservoir all the possible impressions, which we might call "resultant or consequent *vasanas*" that are the remnants of the experience of those objects.

I understand that referring to *vasanas* as "impressions" suggests that *vasanas* can only be the result of an action or experience, but in this regard it bears pointing out that the literal meaning of the word *vasana* is "fragrance." And while a fragrance is a phenomenon that can linger as an aftereffect, the scent itself is an direct emanation from a causal source.

Ernest: Surely each *jiva's vasanas* are determined by the accumulated, unfructified *samskaras* from the previous lives of that *jiva* (not anyone else's). How does "universal pool" fit into the theory of *karma*?

Ted: The macrocosmic causal body, which is the "universal pool of *vasanas*," is like a bank that contains all the money. Just as each client of the bank only has access to the money in his or her account, so each *jiva* only has access to his or her associated bundle of *vasanas*.

Ernest: *Purushottama* is not a term I use. I know it occurs in the *Gita*, but I confess that I am not all that knowledgeable on the *Gita*! I would use the term *paramatman* or, less confusing from a *vyavaharika* perspective, *Isvara*.

Ted: Your references are completely valid and in harmony with what I have been saying. In this regard, *Isvara* is simply the personified (deified?) term for what I refer to as the macrocosmic causal body. By whatever name it is called, this phenomenon is the "pool of pure potentiality" or the "universal ocean of all possible objects/experiences." Thus it is the storehouse of all *vasanas*,

and it is out of this storehouse that are projected the particular *vasana*-bundles or constellations that inform each *jiva* in accordance with the *jiva's karma*. Since *Isvara* is the Creator, from what else would the *vasanas* originate? By whom else would the *vasanas* be allocated to the *jiva*? From where else would the *jiva* draw his or her *vasana* load?

[Ernest's third response with my response to it]:

Note: Ernest's previous comments are indicated as "Ernest 2" and his new comments are indicated as "Ernest 3." My previous comments are indicated as "Ted 1" and my comments in response to those comments indicated as "Ernest 3" are indicated as "Ted 2."

Ernest: Hi, Ted.

Ernest 3: Apologies – I had posted the responses to the question before I received your latest email. It did not seem right to withdraw it then, but of course you can amend it or add to it if you want.

Ernest 2: I'm still mystified by the second paragraph "From *Isvara's* point of view, the *jiva's* journey never ends."

Ted 1: Thank you for your critique in regard to this statement. I agree it is a little misleading. The point of the statement is, as you surmise, that there is no end to the generation of *jivas* – until the *pralaya*, the cosmic dissolution. And even then, *jivas* will again be generated during the next cycle of manifestation. What I am trying to explicate is the fact from a broader perspective, the idea that individuality is nothing more than *mithya*, apparent, that the seemingly independent, volitional entity I erroneously take myself to be is nothing more than a puppet whose every action is empowered solely by the will of *Isvara*. As Krishna, speaking as the self, tells Arjuna in the eighteenth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, "The Lord remains at the seat of the intellect of all beings, Arjuna!, causing all beings to move, revolve, by (magic of his) *maya*, (like) those (figures) which are mounted on a machine (are made to revolve)." (XVIII.61, trans. Swami Dayananda).

Ernest 3: Yes, because the essence of the *jiva* is the same as the essence of *Isvara*: *atman* = *brahman*, not because *Isvara* is the "will" behind every *jiva*. The "will" of the *jiva* is surely the identification of *atman* with ideas in the mind (subtle body of the *jiva*) and the subsequent "empowering" of that body-mind. *Isvara* does not will that someone should commit murder. The traditional teaching allows the *jiva* free will to choose to seek *moksa* and follow a notional path to achieving it. Otherwise what is the point?

Ted 2: I agree with your comment. It should be understood that all my comments concerning *Isvara's* will are simply metaphorical explanations of the impersonal functioning of the grand mechanism of the manifest universe (i.e. apparent reality), whose operation is inviolably governed by the law of *karma*, or cause and-effect. If you'll notice, the word I used to express *Isvara's* involvement was "empowered," not "directed" or "orchestrated." When the "light" of awareness illumines the mechanism of the manifest universe, the mechanism simply functions according to its "programming" or "design," which is otherwise known as *dharma*, the set of

physical, psychological and ethical laws inherent in the projection of the apparent reality, that is cast by means of *maya*, ignorance.

Ted 1: Having said that, I do agree with your next comment...

Ernest 2: This gives the impression that an individual can never gain *moksa* and will always be subject to *samsara*.

Ted 1: I did try to clarify that the *jiva*'s journey does end with the eradication of *avidya*, personal ignorance. Thus the apparent individual can gain *moksa*, liberation.

Ernest 2: Do you mean to say that there will always be *jivas* because new humans are being born from "promoted" vegetable and animal *jivas*?

Ted 1: Yes. The point is that *jivas* do not cease to be. And that actually, whether I am incarnate or not makes little difference in terms of *moksa*, for essentially *moksa* is the understanding that I am not the apparent individual person I seem to be, but rather *atma*, which is *brahman*, limitless awareness. Thus while I may still be associated with a mind-body-sense complex, I am not identified with it.

Ernest 2: The traditional view is that when a person gains self-knowledge, the body-mind continues until the *prarabdha* is exhausted and then that body-mind (person) ceases to exist as the *jivatman* attains *videha-mukti*. That surely signifies the end of that *jiva*'s journey.

Ted 1: Exactly. Such is the result of the eradication of *avidya*, personal ignorance. And this is the end of the *jiva*'s journey. This explanation, which is scripturally-sanctioned as a provisional understanding for those who still take themselves to be *jivas*, nevertheless begs the question "What does it mean to cease to exist as the *jivatman*?"

Ernest 3: *Jivatman*, in my understanding, is virtually synonymous with *jiva*. It means *atman* identified with a body-mind, the "personal self," if you like. As you say, once an individual gains *moksa*, this identification (mostly) ceases, so that there is no longer a *jivatman* (or at least only a very "attenuated" one); there is only *atman* and the *jiva*/body-mind surviving until death. "Ceasing to exist as the *jivatman* just means gaining *moksa* and realizing that you are *atman*."

Ted 2: Precisely.

Ted 1: In order to answer this question, however, we must first consider the question "What exactly is the *jivatman*?" If it is the *pancha-koshas*, the five sheaths, then it will not cease to exist, because the *pancha-koshas* are the impersonal constituents of all *jivas* and will continue to be so until the time of the cosmic dissolution. If it is *atma*, pure awareness, then it will not cease to exist because *brahman-atma*, limitless awareness, is the eternal reality, the very essence of existence itself. The *jivatman* must therefore be nothing more than the notion of ownership/doer-

ship/enjoyer-ship that is assumed with regard to the *vrittis*, mental activities, that arise within the subtle body of the apparent individual due to the particular bundle of *vasanas*, impressions and impression-based preferences and interpretations, conditioning it.

It would seem then that ceasing to exist as the *jivatman* is primarily a matter of ceasing to identify with the mind-body-sense complex, which in turn nullifies the need for the *vasana*-bundle informing the mind-body-sense complex with which it is associated to inhabit any subsequently generated mind-body-sense complex. Thus once the *jiva's prarabdha karma* has been exhausted (i.e. once the bundle of *vasana*-inspired desires slated to play out through the vehicle of the mind-body-sense mechanism presently inhabited by the *jiva*), the *jivatman* ceases to exist.

Ernest 3: Clearly, we agree on this!

Ted 1: But again, what exactly is it that ceases to exist? The mind-body-sense complex that “housed,” that gave form to, the *jiva* was made of the same five causal, subtle and gross elements as all other mind-body-sense complexes, and since energy (which is essentially what the elements are) cannot be destroyed, these elements will simply return to the universal pool of elements, which will continue to generate *jivas* for as long as *maya* conditions *brahman*, and thus it will not technically cease to exist, although the elements that constituted it will obviously cease to assume any of the unique variations of its basic archetypal form that they had previously assumed. And of course *atma*, awareness, will not cease to exist, for it essentially is existence. Hence only the notion that “I am a *jiva*,” my identification with being an apparent individual, ceases.

Ernest 3: Agreed.

Ted 1: From the *jiva's* point of view, the journey through innumerable mind-body-sense complexes comes to an end. *Moksa*, freedom, is attained.

From *Isvara's* point of view, one of its components realized its true identity, so to speak, but the grand mechanism of the manifest universe continues to function as it ever has. Or, to employ another analogy, so ends another subplot within the major plot of the cosmic dream.

The question of where the material for the mechanism or the fodder for the dream comes from leads to subject of your next comments and subsequent question concerning *karma*.

Ernest 2: I have also not encountered the idea of a “universal pool of *vasanas*.”

Ted 1: Not in those terms perhaps, but you have encountered it in the form of the concept of *Isvara*.

Ernest 3: You certainly present an elaborate and well-thought-out system for the *Isvara-jiva* interaction, but it is not one I clearly recognize. This is almost certainly in part due to the fact that you do not seem to use the concept of *samskara* at all, conflating this with the one of *vasanas*.

Although I am familiar with both terms, the former seems to be used more frequently in discussions of *karma* and the latter hardly ever.

Ted 2: You'll have to clarify for me what exactly the difference is between *vasanas* and *samskaras*. My understanding is that *vasanas* are discrete impressions while *samskaras* are constellations, or bundles of, *vasanas* that form particular archetypal personalities, such as those associated with astrological signs or enneagram formations.

Ernest 3: I would have said that it sounds like Samkhya rather than Advaita, except that they do not accept *Isvara*. It is their system, as I understand it, which claims that things are "constituted" of the *gunas* in various proportions. *Prakriti* is regarded as an entity separate from *purusha* (i.e. it is a dualistic system). Perhaps it is Yoga? (They are effectively Samkhya + *Isvara*!)

Without attempting to comment on all aspects of your explanation, there does seem to be one glaring problem, which I think is addressed by Shankara in his attacks on *vrittikara* in *BSB* I.1.4 (I may be mistaken in the reference here. I know I have come across it fairly recently and this has been by most recent MP3 entertainment on my exercise walks!)

The problem is that *brahman* (*Isvara*) cannot be responsible for allocating *samskaras* to *jivas*, because this would mean He would be open to accusations of partiality. They have reaped it during past lives and have to carry it forward in one form or another to future lives until it is exhausted or until they gain *moksa*. You cannot say that the *jiva*'s subtle/causal bodies cease to exist, because the scriptures say they go on to *kailasa/vaikuntha* or the other place. They can even be enlightened by *Brahma* through heavenly discourses (*krama mukti*). It is only the gross body that they pick up in a next life (which is not necessarily a human one).

Ted 2: I do not equate *Isvara* with *brahman* in this context, other than in the broadest sense that there is nothing other than *brahman*, which of course is a perspective that renders our entire discussion moot. By *Isvara* I mean the Creator, which is *brahman* conditioned by *maya upadhi*.

Having said that, as I mentioned earlier and believe I make clear within the explanation we are presently critiquing, *Isvara* is not a volitional entity with a personal agenda. Thus *Isvara* does not allocate *samskaras* to *jivas*. *Isvara* is simply what we might refer to as the realm of pure potentiality (i.e. "universal pool of *vasanas*," or the macrocosmic causal body) from which all *jivas* draw the *vasanas* that are associated with their particular subtle bodies as a result of their apparent actions.

Concerning the dissolution of the subtle body – or in more precise terms, the *vasana*-bundle (i.e. the constellation of impression-based preferences and proclivities that is traditionally conceived of as the subtle body, or soul) that finds expression through a series of innumerable gross bodies during the transmigratory journey of the *jiva*, which in this case is essentially equated with the *ahamkara*, to self-realization, or *moksa* – it, as you say, does not occur until the *jiva* that they constitute or are associated with gains self-knowledge and thereby attains *moksa*.

Ted 1: *Isvara* is the personification, so to speak, of what in technical or impersonal terms we might refer to as the macrocosmic causal body, which is the totality of all microcosmic, or personal, or individual, causal bodies. As such *Isvara* is the "universal pool of *vasanas*." In this

regard, we can liken *Isvara*, or the macrocosmic causal body, to the program for a video game in which are contained all possible moves. Within the mind of *Isvara*, or the macrocosmic causal body, abide all possible *vasanas*, impressions/ideas, in a dormant state. These *vasanas* constitute both the initial “blueprints” for all objects/experiences, the most basic of which are the three *gunas*, and the consequent impressions that are accumulated by the *jiva* through his or her encounter with them.

Ernest 3: I’m familiar with the concepts of *prajna* and *antaryamin-Isvara*, and *taijasa* and *hiranyagarbha*. And of *laya* and *pralaya*, manifest and unmanifest. So yes, of course all of the waking and dream worlds are held in unmanifest condition in *sushupti* at the *vyashti* level and *pralaya* at the big crunch. But it does not make any sense to me to talk about “pools of *vasanas*.” It would be like saying that all possible desires are held in *Isvara*. Surely it is rather *Isvara*’s laws that determine that when a *jivatman* identifies with a particular idea in relation with a particular object, then a (new) desire is formed at that time. It is not that this desire was already present in *Isvara* and was somehow “pulled out” when the interaction took place.

Ted 2: The “blueprints” of all desires exist within *Isvara*, or God the Creator. From where else would they originate?

But, as I mentioned earlier and as you basically recount here, it is through the *jiva*’s identification with a particular desire that the desire impacts his or her subtle body. Of course if we really want to bottom-line the issue, then we have to say that the *jiva* is not a sentient entity in that the gross, subtle and causal bodies are composed of insentient matter, which only function when illumined/enlivened by awareness. Thus the apparent individual only appears sentient and is not really making choices or actively identifying with particular ideas in relation to particular objects or harboring desires. All such occurrences are only apparently happening due to the apparent conjunction of the three-bodied mechanism identified as the *jiva* and pure awareness, or *atman*.

Ted 1: In other words, *Isvara*’s *vasanas* (i.e. ideas) are the basis for the projected apparent reality, and these projections in turn leave their mark on the *jiva*, which is itself a *vasana*/concept, who interacts with them. Furthermore, the *jiva*’s subjective interpretation of these *vasanas* (i.e. objects/experiences) is rooted in the *jiva*’s *vasana*-influenced values, which determine the *jiva*’s *raga-dveshas*, likes and dislikes.

Ernest 3: From where does *Isvara* get his “preferences and dislikes” that He can be said to have *vasanas*? For whom is the “projected reality” “apparent”? Are you suggesting that *Isvara* is deluded by his own *maya*?

Ted 2: As I pointed out, *Isvara*’s *vasanas* are not likes and dislikes, but simply the “blueprints” for all objective phenomena. In this regard *Isvara* doesn’t get “his” *vasanas* from any source outside “himself,” but rather *Isvara* (i.e. the macrocosmic causal body) is the “pool” of all possible *vasanas*. The *vasanas* are the names and forms superimposed on *brahman*, or pure awareness, when it is conditioned by *maya* and having seemingly identified with the three-bodied mechanism that comprises the *jiva* apparently forgets its true nature. The *jiva*’s identification with his or her experience and subjective interpretation of the objective projections of *Isvara*’s “blueprints” are what we think of as the *jiva*’s personal *vasanas*.

Ted 1: In view of this analysis, we see that the apparent reality is essentially a stack of *vasanas*.

Ernest 3: No, I can't buy this. The world IS *brahman*; there is no creation or manifestation. It is "apparent" to the *jiva* because of *avidya* and *adhyasa* and the "naming of forms." I accept that the tendency of a particular *jiva* to give specific names to specific forms may be influenced by that *jiva's vasanas*.

Ted 2: Fair enough. What you say is true. I was speaking in terms of the apparent reality that is projected by *maya*. In other words, I was speaking, not in terms of the essential nature of the apparent reality, but rather in terms of its conditional appearance as a projection or dream.

Ted 1: *Isvara's vasanas* are the basis for the projection of the manifest universe in its *vyavaharika* (i.e. gross-universal-transactional) aspect, including the mind-body-sense apparatus of the *jiva*, and also provide the archetypal possibilities inherent in its *pratibhasika* (i.e. subtle-subjective-internal) aspect.

Ernest 3: Are you saying here that *Isvara* "dreams"?! (I confess here that I don't have any affinity for the concept of *hiranyagarbha*.)

Ted 2: Due to the "magic" of *maya*, the apparent reality is projected, or the metaphorical dream of the manifest universe arises, within the scope of pure awareness.

Ted 1: By means of his or her interactions with *Isvara's vasanas*...

Ernest 3: How does this happen?

Ted 2: It happens through the *jiva's* apparent interaction with the apparent objects that comprise the apparent reality.

Ted 1: ...the *jiva* then accumulates *vasanas* that become associated with the particular subtle body informing that *jiva*, and these *vasanas* consequently become what we think of as the *jiva's* personal *vasanas*. These *vasanas* then influence the *jiva's* values, determine the *jiva's* preferences and, depending on the degree of their intensity, inspire or compel the *jiva's* actions. As long as the *jiva* remains self-ignorant, he or she will invariably perform actions through which he or she cultivates new *vasanas* or reinforces those already cultivated. Those *vasanas* that are sufficiently strengthened through repeated indulgence begin to control the *jiva*, at which point the *jiva* can no longer resist their influence. Such *vasanas* are said to be "binding," and they compel the *jiva* to pursue the particular desirable objects, which only further fortifies the *vasanas* and thereby sentences the *jiva* to a life characterized by suffering.

As mentioned, the *gunas* are the basic constituents, or primordial *vasanas*, of which all objects are made.

Ernest 3: This is definitely Samkhya, as mentioned above.

Ted 2: I guess you'll have to clarify for me what Vedanta points to as the source of all matter. It is my understanding that Vedanta includes the concept of the *gunas*. At least one whole chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* is dedicated to describing the *gunas* as the fundamental constituents of the apparent reality and detailing their influence on various aspects of it.

Ted 1: As such the *gunas* determine the quality and character of the *jiva's* subtle body. In turn the *jiva's* subtle body, or mind, interacts with the *vasanas* it encounters in the form of the objects constituting *vyavaharikasatyam*, the transactional reality.

Ernest 3: How can inert objects have *vasanas*?

Ted 2: I've explained this point previously, but again, the *vasanas* constituting *vyavaharika satyam* are not *vasanas* in the sense of preferences, but rather the "blueprints" or what we might metaphorically refer to as "*Isvara's* ideas" for all objective phenomena that have manifested as objects due to the power of *maya*.

Ted 1: Though these objects are essentially *sattvic*, composed as they are of *Isvara's* *vasanas*, and are thus neutral in terms of such polarities as good/bad, right/wrong, desirable/undesirable, etc., the *jiva* superimposes upon them a subjective interpretation or evaluation that is based on the quality of the *vasanas* influencing his or her psyche, these subjective interpretations/evaluations are the *vasanas*, or impressions, of the experience that are stored in the portion of the macrocosmic causal body that is associated with and contains the *vasana*-bundle associated with this particular *jiva*, which is what we might call the microcosmic causal body, or the personal unconscious. These *vasanas* inevitably manifest initially as likes and dislikes in the *jiva's* subtle body and subsequently as behavior carried out through the vehicle of the gross body that is compelled or at least influenced by those *vasana*-based preferences and proclivities.

Ernest 3: I'm sure none of this has anything to do with Advaita. Maybe Swami Chinmayananda had partially as one of his sources the same source as that of Shantananda Saraswati. Although (for a time) one of the *shankaracharyas*, he nevertheless confused advaita and Samkhya and Sphota Vada, producing a mish-mash which confused me for years.

Ted 2: Could be. But I would say that it does have to do with *advaita* in the sense that what is described here is nothing more than an apparent circumstance arising within the scope of non-dual awareness. Moreover, I'm not clear on how the concept of *Isvara*, the "Creator," manifesting the apparent reality by means of the projecting power of *maya* has nothing to do with Vedanta. The Vedantic texts I have studied, such as the *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita*, *Panchadasi*, *Aparokshanubhuti* and *Panchakarana*, as well as Swami Paramarthananda's teachings, have all accounted for the projection or manifestation of the apparent reality along these lines. I admit they haven't used the term "*vasanas*" when referring to the fundamental conceptualizations of objects within "*Isvara's* mind," or the macrocosmic causal body, but all attribute the "creation" to *Isvara*, the Creator.

Ted 1: At this point the cycle continues to play out indefinitely through the microcosmic causal, subtle and gross bodies that comprise the *jiva* until such time as the *jiva* assimilates self-knowledge and gains *moksa*, freedom from its identification with these three bodies, the inherent sense of incompleteness that accompanies this identification, the consequent pursuit of objects that the *jiva* erroneously believes will provide him or her with permanent fulfillment and lasting happiness, and the inevitable suffering that ensues when the objects fail to meet the *jiva*'s expectations.

The underlying truth is that ultimately the *vasanas* cannot be personal, for the *jiva* is not the Creator.

Ernest 3: My understanding is that *samskaras* result from the actions of each *jiva*. These are stored in the subtle/causal body (I never remember which), and the ones that are going to fructify in this life effectively give rise to the tendencies to act in particular ways (*vasanas*). So the *samskaras/vasanas* effectively ARE personal, even though of course the entire process takes place, if you like, according to the laws of *Isvara*.

Ted 2: Your comment accords entirely with the points I have been making throughout my explanation. It simply depends on which perspective you are viewing the circumstance from. If you look at it from *Isvara*'s point of view, the *vasanas* and *samskaras* are impersonal. Considered from the *jiva*'s standpoint, they are personal.

Ted 1: Though they seem to be personal because of their association with the *jiva* and their apparent cultivation, reinforcement and eventual neutralization through the *jiva*'s actions, the *vasanas* must have their source in a far more powerful and pervasive being that is responsible for the projections that take place via the vehicles of the myriad *jivas* inhabiting the apparent reality, which are, to reiterate the words of Krishna, nothing more than figures mounted on the grand machine of the manifest universe who are caused to move by the magic of *Isvara*'s *maya*.

Ernest 3: So you also do not accept that there is any free will?

Ted 2: From *Isvara*'s point of view, everything is happening spontaneously according to the impersonal and inviolable law of *karma*. From the *jiva*'s standpoint, there is apparent free will. That is, the *jiva* seems to have a choice concerning whether or not to act on the desires arising within him or her. But the relative intensity of these desires essentially determines the choice the *jiva* will make.

Ted 1: Accordingly, if the nullification of the doer-enjoyer and the closing of the *jiva*'s *karmic* account are effects of understanding rather than exhaustive action, then to whom do the *vasanas* belong? "*Maya*," we might answer. But *maya* is ignorance, and ignorance is not an entity as such. Ironically, ignorance is *Isvara*'s creative power, and thus *Isvara*'s essential character as the Creator. It is in this sense that all *vasanas* belong to *Isvara*.

Ernest 3: This seems to be just a halfway house to saying that everything is *brahman*. Of course this is so from a *paramarthika* perspective, but if we are talking about how things appear/operate

at the empirical level then you have to give explanations at that level. If you accept the existence of *jivas*, then you have to allow them to have *vasanas*.

Ted 2: Actualizing self-knowledge within the apparent realm of experience requires the ability to navigate between the viewpoints of the real and the apparent. So yes, what you say is correct.

Ted 1: As a final note, the fact that *Ishvara* can be equated with what is referred to as the macrocosmic causal body, the total of all causal bodies, is supported by the distinction Vedanta makes between *Ishvara* and *prajna*. *Atma* in its association with the *jiva* is referred to as *prajna*, whereas in its association with the total it is referred to as *Ishvara*. Simply put, *Ishvara* as the Creator is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent, and thus by definition must be the cosmic source of all the possible ideas, which we might call “original or creative *vasanas*” that manifest as experienceable objects as well as the universal reservoir all the possible impressions, which we might call “resultant or consequent *vasanas*” that are the remnants of the experience of those objects.

I understand that referring to *vasanas* as “impressions” suggests that *vasanas* can only be the result of an action or experience, but in this regard it bears pointing out that the literal meaning of the word *vasana* is “fragrance.” And while a fragrance is a phenomenon that can linger as an aftereffect, the scent itself is an direct emanation from a causal source.

Ernest 2: Surely each *jiva's* *vasanas* are determined by the accumulated, unfructified *samskaras* from the previous lives of that *jiva* (not anyone else's). How does “universal pool” fit into the theory of *karma*?

Ted 1: The macrocosmic causal body, which is the “universal pool of *vasanas*,” is like a bank that contains all the money. Just as each client of the bank only has access to the money in his or her account, so each *jiva* only has access to his or her associated bundle of *vasanas*.

Ernest 3: But why would this be necessary? The *jiva* is allocated a new “minute body” at the time of death of the old body, and is then “cooked” in the *panchagni* of *Chandogya Upanishad* v.3-10 or *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* VI.2. The *samskaras* remain associated with the *jiva* until such time as they are allocated to a new gross body. After all, the nature of the body which is to be allocated is determined by past *karma*.

Ted 2: I don't understand how your comment is in conflict with my explanation. The statement that the *samskaras* remain associated with the *jiva* (i.e. the subtle body) throughout its series of incarnations equates with the analogy that the *jiva* only has access to his or her associated bundle of *vasanas*.

Ernest 2: *Purushottama* is not a term I use. I know it occurs in the *Gita*, but I confess that I am not

all that knowledgeable on the *Gita*! I would use the term *paramatman* or, less confusing from a *vyavaharika* perspective, *Isvara*.

Ted 1: Your references are completely valid and in harmony with what I have been saying. In this regard, *Isvara* is simply the personified (deified?) term for what I refer to as the macrocosmic causal body. By whatever name it is called, this phenomenon is the “pool of pure potentiality” or the “universal ocean of all possible objects/experiences.” Thus it is the storehouse of all *vasanas*, and it is out of this storehouse that are projected the particular *vasana*-bundles or constellations that inform each *jiva* in accordance with the *jiva’s karma*. Since *Isvara* is the Creator, from what else would the *vasanas* originate? By whom else would the *vasanas* be allocated to the *jiva*? From where else would the *jiva* draw his or her *vasana* load?

[Ernest’s fourth response]:

Ernest: Hi, Ted. It’s getting too complicated now to make further comments inline, so I will just add a few further remarks here.

Firstly, with your additional clarifications, I can see that our essential views do not differ after all. As I guessed, it was your exclusive use of the term *vasana* that principally confused me. Here is how I described the difference between that and *samskaras* in *Book of One: Behavioral Tendencies*.

These are called *vasanas* in Sanskrit, literally meaning “wishing” or “desiring,” but used in Advaita in the sense of the subconscious or latent tendencies in one’s nature that will have their way eventually, like it or not. (Note that we tend to add “s” to an ITRANS representation of a Sanskrit word when we want it to be in the plural. Obviously the actual plural in Sanskrit does not end in an “s.”) Edward de Bono, of *Lateral Thinking: A Textbook of Creativity* fame, describes a model that is helpful in thinking about this (ref. 53). If you take some Jello (jelly), solidified and turned out onto a plate, and you trickle very hot water onto the top, it will run off onto the plate and leave behind a faint channel where the hot water melted the Jello. If you now pour on more hot water, it will tend to run into the same channels as before, since these offer the line of least resistance, and deepen the channels. If this is done repeatedly, very deep channels will form and it will become difficult, if not impossible, to get the water to run anywhere else. The equivalent of an entrenched habit has been formed.

This tendency to act in a certain way, in a given situation, is called a *vasana*. The less aware we are at the moment of action, the more likely it is that we will act in that way. If we are alert in the moment, with our intellect able to discriminate between alternative courses of action, then it is possible that the innate tendency may be overcome. Just as the channels in the Jello have been formed by the earlier pouring on of water, so our *vasanas* are formed by our past actions: *samskaras*.

The motives behind our current actions affect our future ones by way of *samskaras* (remember that the “m” is usually pronounced as “n” – see Appendix 3). When we perform an action with a desire for a result, this generates *samskaras* that will affect future actions. They give rise to the *vasanas* already mentioned. At any given moment we will tend to act in the way that is determined by our *vasanas*, which in turn depends upon our *samskaras*.

(The terms *vasana* and *samskara* are to a large degree used almost interchangeably in this book and elsewhere. Correctly speaking, *vasana* refers to unconscious impressions, knowledge derived from memory, desires and longing, mistaken inclinations and so on, i.e. there is a generally negative interpretation to the term. In the case of *samskara*, there is a sense of cleansing or purification – the root *sam* means “auspicious.”)

Etc. (there is lots more related stuff about the different types of *samskaras*, *karma*, free will and so on, but you get the idea!).

Also, Martin asked some questions of Sadananda regarding the last Science and Vedanta post, and Sadananda’s response included a usage of “global” *vasanas* just like yours! So it looks as though you are right and I am wrong! I guess I missed out on some key text somewhere.

Regarding *gunas*, my understanding is that Advaita’s use of the terms relates to attributes or properties in the same way that we talk of name and form. After all, it would not make sense to speak of actual substances, since there is no actual substance at all in Advaita (other than *brahman*) whereas, as I said, Samkhya do have a *prakriti* separate from *purusha*, and this is actually constituted of the *gunas*.

But I think that maybe my understanding of this is also awry! (I guess my tendency has always been to go for the jugular of absolute reality and ignore the interim explanations to some degree.) Here is what D. Venugopal says on the subject:

“The components of *māyā* are threefold. They are (i) *sattva*, or intelligence, knowledge and purity; (ii) *rajas*, or desire, energy and action; and (iii) *tamas*, or ignorance, grossness and inaction¹. These are called *gunas*, and every manifestation has all the three cohering in differing measures. They are not qualities, but components of *māyā* which bind *ātmā* to the body². *Sattva* leads to the experience of the pleasure (*sukha*) and makes the experiencer identify *ātmā* with the experiencer and say, ‘I am happy.’ *Rajas* gives rise to a more deeply entrenched sense of bondage through similar identification of *ātmā* with the likes and dislikes and the actions arising from them. *Tamas* binds through the inability to acquire discriminative knowledge and the incapacity to do what is to be done.”

So the overall comment seems to be that we mainly agree, but on those topics where we disagreed you are probably correct – my apologies! It just goes to show the value of having a number of us responding to the same question.

~ Best wishes, Ernest