

# Concerning the *Gun*as and *Dharma*

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**Natalie:** Hi Ted, I hope you are well and having a nice time over the holidays. Thanks again for all your time, energy and efforts. They are appreciated so much.

**Ted:** Thank you, Natalie. Appreciation is much appreciated.

**Natalie:** Thanks to Vedanta, self-knowledge is firm for me. The pesky doubts have been removed. And the assimilation phase seems to be progressing.

**Ted:** Vedanta is the berries; there is nothing like it that I've ever encountered. It ties up all the loose ends and at the same time unties the noose of *samsara*. So glad to hear you're reaping the benefits as well.

**Natalie:** I have two issues that I was hoping you might be able to advise me on, one about *rajas* and one about *dharma*.

First, I wanted to ask about how you recommend dealing with *rajas*.

The awareness that I am is of course completely unaffected by any of the *gun*as. Most of the time I can observe the *rajas* when it arises. But if the mind does not become *sattvic*, then it becomes hard to make sound decisions in a *rajasic* state. So my question is, how does one convert a *rajasic* state of mind to a *sattvic* state of mind?

When I see *rajas* arising, I remind myself that life is a zero-sum game. Doing more (and taking on more) will not make me complete... since I am limitless, whole awareness. This may or may not work completely depending on the situation and the intensity of the *rajas*.

Ultimately, the best antidote for *rajas* seems to be *karma yoga*. As a *jiva*, I dedicate all my decisions and actions to *Isvara* and take the results (whatever they are) as *prasad*. This takes away the stress associated with having made decisions when the mind was not completely *sattvic*. It's also a perfect reminder that the *jiva* is not the doer and that ultimately whatever action I have undertaken is the wish of *Isvara*.

If you have any other suggestions or recommendations on how to deal with *rajas*, I would be grateful.

**Ted:** You're using the best method there is. *Karma yoga* cures all – or at least paves the way for the ultimate purifier – self-knowledge.

Regulating the relative proportions of *rajas* and *tamas* in order to cultivate a predominately *sattvic* mind is a pretty complex issue. You have to pay careful attention to the post-digestive effects (i.e.

the longer-term consequences rather than the immediate gratification or agitation) of the food you eat, the work you do, your recreational activities, the nature and dynamics of your relationships, your attitude and habits regarding sex, the way you manage money, your living environment, etc. You essentially have to monitor your interaction with all the objects that constitute your environment, the attitudes that color your experience of them and the actions that you take in response to them. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. You simply have to observe how these factors affect you and then adjust accordingly. Once you get used to consciously interpreting and evaluating your experience, the adjustments you make are simply a matter of common sense. And as with anything in life, the more you practice, the better you get at it.

Ultimately, however, the *gunas* are not under your control. You can manage them effectively for the most part, but you will never completely avoid the effects, both positive and negative, of *rajas* and *tamas*. Thus the *karma yoga* attitude should be the bedrock of all your actions.

**Natalie:** Second, I wanted to ask about *dharma*. I know that our decisions should adhere to personal and universal *dharma*. But sometimes that can be quite tricky to determine in certain situations. Lately, I've been focusing on choosing the path which brings me the most peace of mind. I was reading in one of the *satsangs* at the ShiningWorld website that the definition of success for an inquiring *jiva* is peace of mind. This resonates a lot with me. However, even this is not a perfect guideline, since what can bring one peace of mind may sometimes inconvenience others.

**Ted:** Determining what is *dharmic* is difficult at times, but with regard to your last comment you might consider two things.

First, if you are bothered by the inconvenience your decision has caused others, then did that choice really bring you peace of mind? Perhaps you are confusing peace of mind with egoic satisfaction. I'm not saying that you are, but it is something worth considering. The ego will cook up any justification it can for getting what it wants.

Second (and this might be more important), you might consider more deeply whether the inconvenience you say the action is causing others is truly a breach of *dharma*. Perhaps you are simply not conforming to the other person's *raga-dveshas* (i.e. binding *vasanas*, compelling likes and dislikes). Perhaps your behavior only enables their dependence on you rather than affording them the opportunity to develop self-reliance. Or even if your behavior is not to their liking, perhaps it is important for your own spiritual growth that you break certain co-dependent habits that characterize your relationship with those whom you have "inconvenienced." Again, I don't know the particulars of the situations to which you refer, but it is important to honestly assess the dynamics of your interactions with others and not just leap to the conclusion that you are responsible for the circumstances others find themselves in due to their own unresolved issues.

**Natalie:** Ultimately, I wonder if the *jiva* can ever know whether an action performed is *dharmic* or *adharmaic* in the grand scheme of things.

**Ted:** Pretty difficult. The best the *jiva* can do is use common sense aided by scriptural guidance and rooted in self-inquiry. The "Golden Rule" is basically the guiding principle. That probably sounds a little cheesy. But if you act with the best intentions in mind, then *Isvara* (i.e. the *dharma*-

governed law of *karma* by which the grand mechanism of the manifest universe operates) will take care of the rest. Or even if you lack faith in the benevolent nature of *Isvara*, then you can at least take solace in the fact that your intention was pure and consequently enjoy peace of mind. As Krishna says in the *Gita*, renouncing the results of actions is the best form of renunciation because it affords immediate peace of mind.

**Natalie:** The obvious actions (taking care of yourself and family, raising your kids, not injuring people) are easy with regards to following *dharma*. But more subtle situations that come up in day-to-day life can be more tricky. I know that the intention underlying the action is important, but even sorting out intention can be very tricky. So again, I try to apply the peace of mind principle. My primary identity now is that of awareness and that of a *jiva* engaged in self-inquiry. So for the *jiva's* inquiry to progress (to *moksa*), I figure peace of mind is the best intention underlying action. I experience *moksa* every day, knowing that I am the self which is unaffected by what happens in *maya*. But certain aspects of decision-making do cause the mind to become agitated affecting inquiry.

Is there a particular guiding principle that you recommend which can keep more subtle decision-making to be more *dharmic*?

**Ted:** As mentioned, the “Golden Rule.” But be honest about how you would actually want others to treat you. It is sometimes easy to interpret the principle as a mandate to bend over backwards in an attempt to satisfy everyone’s every whim, to never say a critical word, to never cause another unrest by voicing an honest criticism or asking another to amend his or her behavior. But is that how you would want to be treated? Wouldn’t you want to be called on your shit? Or at least can you not see the virtue of not aiding what might very well be another’s negative tendencies? Common sense imbued with unflinching honesty is the key. And then compassion for your own effort fueled by the understanding that you did the best you could with what *Isvara* gave you at the time. Bear in mind that all actions take place in a dualistic apparent reality, and that the apparent individual person performing them is never going to be perfect. Awareness is perfect, but all apparent individual persons – including the greatest saints – are imperfect. So it goes.

**Natalie:** Here too I find that *karma yoga* is immensely helpful... ultimately, it’s all *Isvara's* show, and while I appear to be performing actions, I realize that, as a *jiva*, my choices, decisions, results and consequences all come by *Isvara's* grace. And I, as awareness, am completely unaffected no matter what choices were made by the apparent *jiva*.

**Ted:** Right on. Be both vigilant and forgiving. Do your best, and then let it rest. ☺

**Natalie:** Any advice in these matters will be much appreciated. I hope you have a wonderful time in India and I am looking forward to seeing the video.

~ With best wishes, Natalie

**Ted:** Thank you for your kind wishes.

~ *Namaste*, Ted