

# Is *Isvara* Only *Sattvic*?

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**Elmore:** Hi, Ted. I am watching the videos of James' talks on Atmananda's *Atma Darshan*. During the talks, James mentioned a fascinating thought on *Isvara* that I have not read or heard before properly: *Isvara* is only *sattvic* in mind, and *maya* is called *triguna* and consists of all three *gunas* – *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*.

So *Isvara* cannot have created the terrorist attack in Paris recently, because it is not *rajasic* or *tamasic* in mind?

When we say that we dedicate our actions to *Isvara*, it does not mean that *Isvara* will create attack in Paris, but *maya*/ignorance through *rajasic* and *tamasic* energies has done it through some people?

It is a little bit confusing, so could you talk more about this?

~ Best regards, Elmore

**Ted:** Hi, Elmore. The first thing you need to understand is that *Isvara* is not a volitional entity that is operating the universe according to a personal agenda. *Isvara* is the personification of the manifest universe – both its subtle and gross aspects – and the myriad impersonal, inviolable and infallible physical, psychological and ethical laws that govern its operation. In other words, the manifest universe is essentially an intricate network of cause-and-effect occurrences through which results are produced that correlate directly with their physical, emotional and intellectual causes. In this way we can say that *Isvara* is the creator, sustainer and resolver of the universe. But this power is not wielded by an entity who is driven by desire or who is inclined to reward the doers of “good” deeds and punish the perpetrators of “bad.” *Isvara* is simply the *dharma* field, which according to the law of *karma* produces the inevitable effects of the actions executed within the scope of its being as determined by the laws governing the field.

For instance, if I drop a plate while carrying it from the dinner table to the sink, it is going to fall at a rate of 9.8 miles per second per second (at least if I am on Earth at roughly sea level) whether I want it to or intend it to or have prayed that it fall at a faster or slower rate or whether it was used to serve fresh food or leftovers or healthy food or poisoned food. Universal ethical norms or moral *dharma* and psychological laws will have an effect – often immediate (at least to some degree) and inevitably long-term – on the inner state and conscience of the person who executed the action that correlates directly with the intention behind the action. But the laws themselves are impersonal. Therefore while we say that *Isvara* is the *karma phala datta*, the giver of the fruits of one's actions, it is only so in a figurative sense – that is, in the sense that the laws governing the field determine the fruits of all actions.

*Isvara* is the offspring of *brahman-in-maya-upadhi*.

*Brahman* is absolute, unconditioned, limitless, all-pervasive, perfectly full, impersonal, non-dual awareness. As such, *brahman* has no causal nature, for that which is non-dual and all-pervasive

has no arena within which to act, and thus no context against which any movement or change, which is the hallmark of action, could be measured; that which is limitless and unconditioned has no instruments with which to act nor any boundary or characteristics by means of which it could be distinguished from any other thing it might act upon; and that which is perfectly-full and impersonal has no lack of anything for which it might execute an action in order to gain nor any desire for an object it lacks nor any personal will that would motivate it to act.

*Maya* is a primordial power within *brahman* that has two aspects. It is the original “matter” that provides the substance of which all the objective phenomena – both subtle and gross – are composed. It is also the ignorance that causes *brahman* to seemingly “forget” its true limitless nature and take itself to be the myriad *upadhis* (i.e. the innumerable “forms,” or objective phenomena, that comprise the apparent reality/manifest universe). *Maya* works its cosmic duplicity by means of two powers: *avaruna shakti* and *vikshepa shakti*. *Avaruna shakti* is the power of obscuration that causes *brahman* to “forget” its true nature as limitless, unmodified awareness. *Vikshepa shakti* is the power of projection that makes limitless, unmodified awareness appear to be a vast array of limited modifications, or discrete objective phenomena. *Maya*’s effect on the psyche of the *jiva*, the apparent individual, is *avidya*, self-ignorance. Since *avidya* is essentially the microcosmic form of *maya*, it too is characterized by the twin powers of *avaruna shakti* and *vikshepa shakti*. Thus due to the influence of *avaruna shakti* the mind fails to recognize its true nature as the limitless awareness illumining it, and due to the influence of *vikshepa shakti* it identifies with the I-sense arising within it, and thereby, for all practical purposes, “transforms” limitless awareness into a limited person.

Your understanding of what James meant when he said that *Isvara* is only “*sattvic* in mind,” as you put it, is incorrect. First of all, I’m almost positive that you have misquoted James. I don’t think James has said that *Isvara* is only *sattvic* in mind. I’m more inclined to believe he must have said that *Isvara* is pure *sattva* and that the mind arises from pure *sattva*. No matter what the exact wording was, however, the fact of the matter is that the fabric of *maya* consists of the three fundamental energetic constituents – *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. When the power of *maya* conditions *brahman* it creates three fundamental macrocosmic *upadhis*: *maya upadhi*, *avidya upadhi* and *prakriti upadhi*. The *sattvic* aspect of *maya* produces *maya upadhi* and gives rise to *Isvara* (i.e. God-the-creator-sustainer-resolver), the *rajasic* aspect produces *avidya upadhi* and gives rise to *jiva* (i.e. the apparent individual person), and the *tamasic* aspect produces *prakriti upadhi* and gives rise to *jagat* (i.e. the five-elemental manifestation).

The next step in the process of manifestation is that *prakriti upadhi* spawns the “material universe” in both its subtle and gross aspects, which includes both “inner” subjective phenomena and “outer” objective phenomena. As every aspect of the manifestation is composed of the three *gunas*, such is the case with *prakriti upadhi*. Hence, the *sattvic* aspect of *prakriti upadhi* produces the perceptive organs and the “inner instrument,” which consists of the mind, intellect, ego and memory; the *rajasic* aspect produces the active organs and the physiological systems; and the *tamasic* aspect gives rise to the gross elements of which all tangible objects are composed.

While it can be a bit confusing, *Isvara* is said to be pure *sattva* in the sense that *Isvara* is a product of the *sattvic* influence of *maya* on *brahman*. And the mind is *sattvic* in the sense that it is the product of the *sattvic* aspect of *prakriti upadhi*. Everything within the context of the manifestation, however, is really a composite of various degrees of all three *gunas*. Although one of the *gunas* is always predominant in any given object, thought, emotion or action, none of these phenomena is entirely *sattvic*, *rajasic* or *tamasic*. Moreover, *Isvara* is simply the name we give to

the manifest universe as a whole, and thus everything – absolutely everything – obtaining and transpiring within the manifestation is *Isvara*.

Therefore in answer your question concerning the tragic events that occurred in Paris recently, *Isvara* both did and did not “create” these terrorist attacks. That is, *Isvara* did “create” the events, but not as a personal entity exercising its free will in service of a subjective agenda. Rather *Isvara* is the set of impersonal laws governing the thoughts and actions of both the perpetrators of the terrorist act as well as those of its victims and subsequent avengers. *Sattvic* thoughts and deeds are characterized by intelligence, kindness and compassion; *rajasic* by passion, desire and dynamism; *tamasic* by dullness, confusion and cruelty. *Isvara* doesn’t orchestrate events, but rather is the organic mechanism, we might say, that operates spontaneously due to its being illumined and thereby enlivened (i.e. set in motion) by awareness. In short, *Isvara* is the supreme doer, the cosmic actor playing every role in the grand drama of life.

~ All the best, Ted