

Isvara and Adharma

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Tobias: *Namaste*, Ted, happy Fourth of July!

I have a relative who is very interested in the topic of *karma*. It is making me think very carefully about the teaching, and I have a question.

How do we reconcile the idea that *Isvara* is the *karmaphaladata* with the concept of free will? Meaning, if I do something, we can say (*Gita* 2.47) that *Isvara* gives the results. However, part of the “result” is a person’s response, which is the result of their free will. To make matters more confusing, we have the passage where Krishna says I am the action “not opposed to *dharma*.” So then if the reaction you get from someone is *adharmic*, then you have the puzzle of how *Isvara* can be the giver of an *adharmic* response to your action.

I would love to know what you think on this one. By the way, I have read (and understand) the view that free will can be thought off across three levels (i.e. seemingly exists for the *jiva*, does not exist from *Isvara*’s perspective since He is in control of everything, and is a moot point when you think about *Brahman*, since nothing actually happens). I think this question explores the interplay between these three dimensions, perhaps.

My own view (let’s see if I get this right) is that *Isvara*’s world by design gives scope for *adharmic* behavior, and in this sense we can *Isvara* is the giver of the result. *Isvara*’s order includes people acting out of apparent free will. Thanks in advance.

~ Regards, Tobias

Ted: Hi, Tobias.

The conclusion you have reached is correct.

Isvara is the personification of the physical, psychological and ethical/moral laws that govern the cause-and-effect operation of the manifestation (i.e. the *dharma*-governed law of *karma*).

The *dharma* field (i.e. the manifestation, so termed as the “*dharma* field” because it is governed by *dharma*) is a grand organic mechanism that functions according to an intrinsic self-sustaining design, which is evident in the self-correcting nature of every system within the whole (e.g. the self-regulation of the food chain, etc.) that enables it to accommodate any action by spontaneously reconfiguring its impersonal, inviolable and infallible network of cause-and-effect occurrences in a way that serves the best interests of the total. Though the immediate effects of any action may not appear just when viewed through the subjective lens of the apparent individual’s *guna*-rooted, *vasana*-based, *raga-dvesha*-influenced values, the *dharma*-governed law of *karma* preserves the overall well-being of the total and promotes the spiritual growth of all by means of the circumstances with which its results require people to experience and process.

Bearing in mind that *Isvara* personifies the *dharma* field, we can say that desire that aligns with

the harmonious functioning of the field – that is, the series of causes and effects that most readily serve the best interests of the total (e.g. not polluting the environment, for even though its effects can be corrected, polluting the environment is not an action that is in harmony with the way the system is naturally designed to function) – most readily reflects *Isvara*'s nature. Still, *Isvara* (i.e. the *dharma*-governed operation of the field) will give (i.e. impersonally produce) the results that are the inevitable outcome of their initiatory actions. Thus if someone behaves badly or responds inappropriately to a situation, it is the natural outcome of prior actions and their effects. So in this sense *Isvara* is the giver of the *adharmic* response. It should be understood, however, that *Isvara* is not a personal entity that doles out rewards and punishments. *Isvara* is simply the intelligent design of the *dharma* field and the cause-and-effect operation that spontaneously ensues from that.

The point of Krishna's comment within the context of which it is uttered is that personal desire is not a bad thing. We don't have to get rid of desire. We simply don't want to be bound by it. In other words, we don't want to be driven by the erroneous notion that the fulfillment of our desires is necessary for our well-being. As limitless conscious existence, we are already whole and complete as we are. The desires that arise within the apparent individual we appear to be can be acknowledged and acted upon. In fact it is desire that makes the world go around and, moreover, is the essential factor that drives our pursuit of *moksa*. Desire is only problematic if we become dependent on certain objects in order to feel that we are okay and if we are so attached to the fulfillment of our desires that we are willing to transgress *dharma*, which always involves hurting others and ourselves, in order to get what we feel we need.

As you correctly conclude, the *dharma* field allows the apparent individual apparent free will in order that the apparent person can play the game of finding its way to freedom while still living within the context of the apparent reality.

~ All the best, Ted